

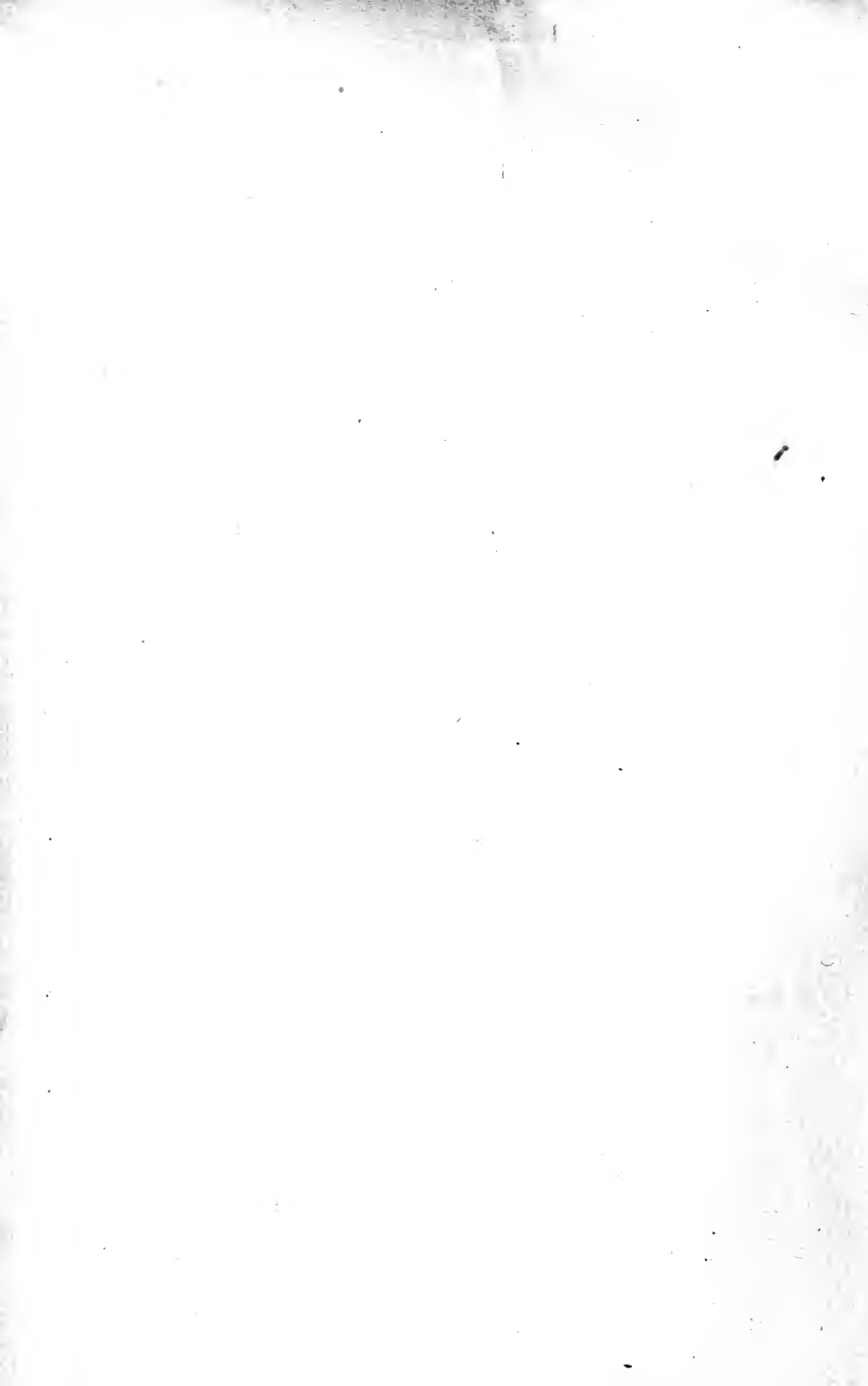


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# HALF A HERO.

VOL. I.



# HALF A HERO.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"MR. WITT'S WIDOW," "A CHANGE OF AIR," ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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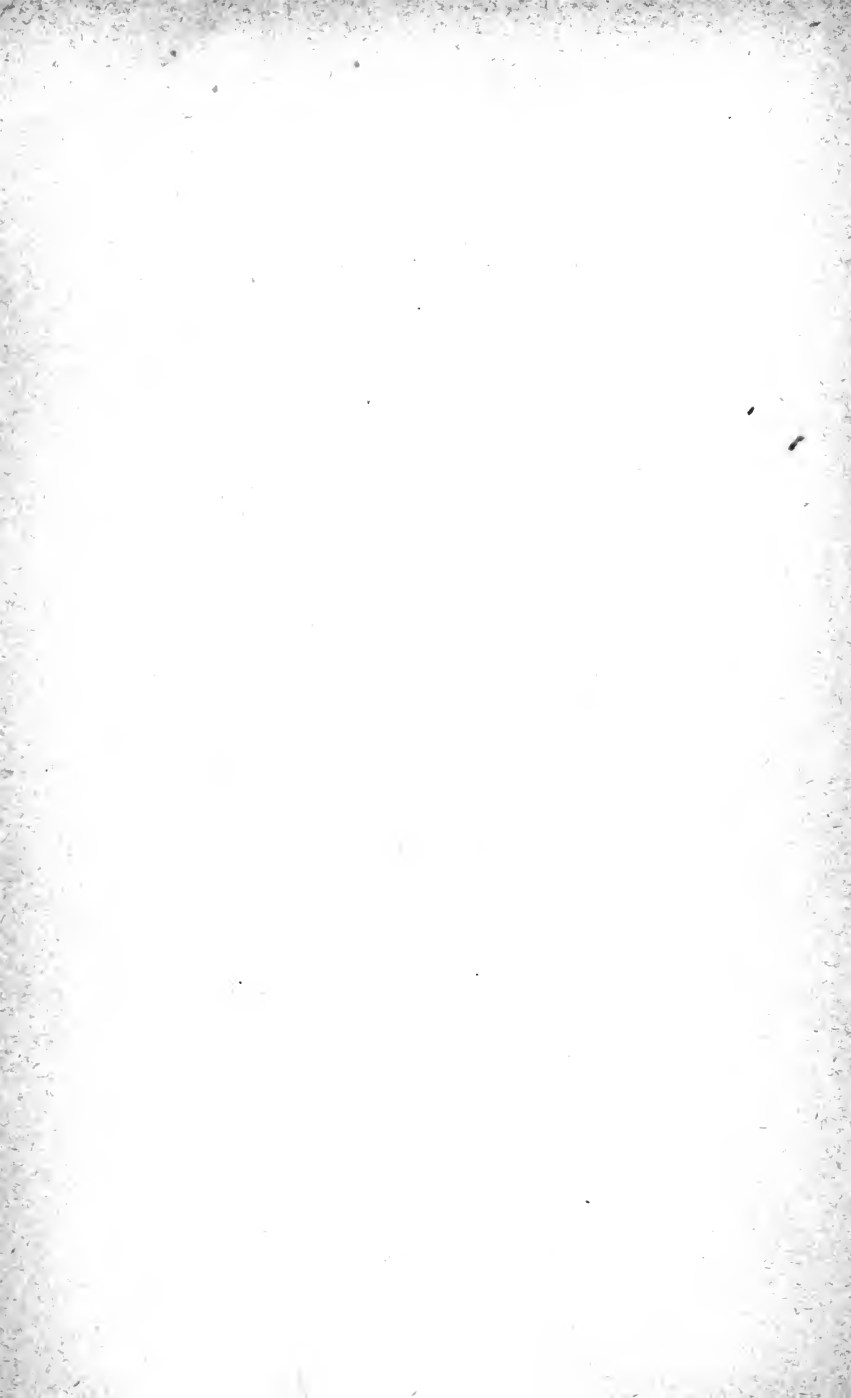


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## CHAPTER I.

### THE IMPOSSIBLE—INEVITABLE.

IN the garden the question was settled without serious difference of opinion. If Sir Robert Perry really could not go on—and Lady Eynesford was by no means prepared to concede even that—then Mr. Puttock, *bourgeois* as he was, or Mr. Coxon, conceited and priggish though he might be, must come in. At any rate, the one indisputable fact was the impossibility of Mr. Medland: this was, to Lady Eynesford's mind, axiomatic, and, in the safe

privacy of her family circle (for Miss Scaife counted as one of the family, and Captain Heseltine and Mr. Flemyng did not count at all), she went so far as to declare that, let the Governor do as he would (in the inconceivable case of his being so foolish as to do anything of the kind), she at least would not receive Mr. Medland. Having launched this hypothetical thunderbolt, she asked Alicia Derosne to give her another cup of tea. Alicia poured out the tea, handed it to her sister-in-law, and asked,

“But, Mary, what is there so dreadful about Mr. Medland?”

“Everything,” said Lady Eynesford.

“Still,” suggested Miss Scaife, “if the creatures are bent on having him——”

“My dear Eleanor, what is a Governor for?” demanded Lady Eynesford.

“To do as he’s told and subscribe to the Cup,” interposed Dick Derosne. And he added, “They

are having a palaver. Old Perry's been in an hour and a half."

Captain Heseltine and Mr. Flemyng looked at their watches and nodded gravely.

"Poor Willie!" murmured Lady Eynesford. "He'll miss his ride."

Poor Willie—that is to say, His Excellency William Delaporte, Baron Eynesford, Governor of New Lindsey—deserved all the sympathy his wife's exclamation implied, and even more. For, after a vast amount of fencing and an elaborate disquisition on the state of parties in the colony, Sir Robert Perry decisively refused the dissolution the Governor offered, and ended by saying, with eyebrows raised and the slightest shrug of his shoulders,

"In fact, sir, it's my duty to advise you to send for Mr. Medland."

The Governor pushed his chair back from the table.

"You won't try again?" he asked.

"Impossible, until he has failed."

"You think Puttock out of the question?"

"Quite. He has not following enough : people wouldn't stand Medland being passed over. Really, I don't think you'll find Medland hard to get on with. He's a very able man. For myself, I like him."

The Governor sat silent for a few minutes. Sir Robert, conceiving that his interview was at an end, rose to take leave. Lord Eynesford expressed much regret at being obliged to lose his services : Sir Robert replied suitably, and was at the door before the Governor reverted to Mr. Medland.

"There are queer stories about him, aren't there?" he asked. "I mean about his private life."

"Well, there is some vague gossip of the kind."

"There now ! That's very awkward. He must



come here, you know, and what shall I say to my wife?"

"She's been dead three or four years now," said Sir Robert, not referring to the Governor's wife. "And it's only rumour after all. Nothing has ever come to light on the subject."

"But there's a girl."

"There's nothing against the girl—except of course——"

"Oh, just so," said the Governor; "but that makes it awkward. Besides, somebody told me he used to get drunk."

"I think you may disregard that," said Sir Robert. "It only means that he likes his glass of wine as most of us do."

Sir Robert retired, and presently Dick Derosne, who acted as his brother's private secretary, came in. The Governor was in an easy-chair, smoking a cigar.

"So you've settled it," said Dick.

"Yes. Perry won't hear of going on."

"Well, he hardly could after being beaten by seventeen on his biggest bill. What's going to happen?"

Now the Governor thought fit to assume that the course he had, after so much hesitation, determined upon was, to every sensible man, the only possible course. Perhaps he fancied that he would thus be in a stronger position for justifying it to a sensible woman.

"Of course," he said, in a tone expressive of some surprise at a question so unnecessary, "I am sending for Medland."

Dick Derosne whistled. The Governor relapsed into sincerity.

"No help for it," he pleaded. "You must back me up, old man, with Mary. Women can't understand constitutional obligations."

“She said she wouldn’t have him to the house,” remarked Dick.

“Oh, Eleanor Scaife must persuade her. I wish you’d go and tell them, Dick. I’m expecting Medland in half-an-hour. I wish I was out of it. I distrust these fellows, both them and their policy.”

“And yet you’ll have to be civil to them.”

“Civil! I must be just as cordial as I was with Perry. That’s why it’s so important that Mary should be——”

“Reasonable?” suggested Dick.

“Well, yes,” said Lord Eynesford.

“How does Perry take it?”

“Oh, I don’t think he minds much. He thinks Medland’s gang will soon fall to pieces and he’ll come back. Besides, the K.C.M.G. softens the blow.”

“Ah! It’s the cheap defence of nations now—*vice* chivalry, out of fashion,” laughed Dick.

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Hitherto Lord Eynesford and his wife had enjoyed their reign. Everything had gone well. The Governor agreed heartily with the measures introduced by Sir Robert Perry's Ministry, and his relations with the members of the Government, and especially with its chief, had been based on reciprocal liking and respect: they were most of them gentlemen and all of them respectable men, and, what was hardly less important, their wives and families had afforded no excuse for the exercise of Lady Eynesford's somewhat fastidious nicety as to manners, or her distinctly rigid scrutiny into morals. Under such conditions, the duty and the inclinations of Government House went hand-in-hand. Suddenly, in the midst of an apparently peaceful session, came what the Governor considered an unhallowed combination between a discontented section of Perry's party, and the Opposition under Medland's leadership. The result was

the defeat of the Government, the resignation of Sir Robert, and the inevitability of Mr. Medland.

Entering the Legislative Assembly as the representative of an outlying constituency, Medland had speedily made himself the spokesman of the growing Labour Party, and now, after fifteen years of public life, and a secret and subterranean struggle with the old middle-class element, was established as the leader of a united party, so powerful in numbers that the accession of some dozen deserters had placed it in a majority. Mr. Coxon had led the revolt against Sir Robert Perry, and the Governor disliked Coxon even more thoroughly than he distrusted Medland. Miss Scaife said that Medland was the more dangerous, inasmuch as he was sincere and impetuous, while Coxon was neither; but then, the Governor would reply, Coxon was a snob, and Medland, if not exactly a gentleman according to the ideas of Eton and Christchurch—

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and Lord Eynesford adhered to these ideas—scorned a bad imitation where he could not attain the reality, and by his simplicity and freedom from pretension extorted the admission of good breeding. But why compare the men? He would have to accept both, for Medland must offer Coxon a place, and beyond doubt the offer would be accepted. The Governor was alarmed for the fate of New Lindsey under such ruling, and awaited with apprehension his next interview with his wife.

Dick Derosne had fulfilled his mission, and his tidings had spread dismay on the lawn. Lady Eynesford reiterated her edict of exclusion against the new Premier; Eleanor Scaife smiled and told her she would be forced to receive him. Alicia in vain sought particulars of Mr. Medland's misdeeds, and the *aides-de-camp* speculated curiously on the composition of the Cabinet, Captain Heseltine betting Mr. Flemyng five to two that it would

include Mr. Giles, the leading tailor of Kirton, to whose services the Captain had once been driven to resort with immense trepidation and disastrous results. As a fact, the Captain lost his bet ; the Cabinet did not include Mr. Giles, because that gentleman, albeit an able speaker, and a man of much greater intellect than most of his customers, was suspected of paying low wages to his employés, though, according to the Captain, it was impossible that he should pay them as little as their skill deserved.

“I don't think I ever saw Mr. Medland,” said Alicia, who had come out from England only a few months before.

“I have seen him,” said Eleanor Scaife. “In fact, I had a little talk with him at the Jubilee Banquet.”

“Was he sober ?” Lady Eynesford, in her bitterness of spirit, allowed herself to ask.

"Mary! Of course he was. He was also rather interesting. He was then in mourning for Mrs. Medland, and he told me he only came because his absence would have been put down to disloyalty."

The mention of Mrs. Medland increased the downward curve of Lady Eynesford's mouth, and she was about to speak, when Dick Derosne exclaimed,

"Well, you can see him now, Al. He's walking up the drive."

The party and their tea-table were screened by trees, and they were able, themselves unseen, to watch Mr. Medland, as, in obedience to the Governor's summons, he walked slowly up to Government House. A girl of about seventeen or eighteen accompanied him to the gate, and left him there with a merry wave of her hand, and he strode on alone, his hands in his trousers pockets and a soft felt hat on the back of his head.



James—or, as his followers called him, “Jimmy”—Medland was forty-one years of age, once an engineer, now a politician, by profession, a tall, loose-limbed, slouching man, with stiff black hair and a shaven face. His features were large and had been clear-cut, but by now they had grown coarser, and his deep-set eyes, under heavy lids and bushy eyebrows, alone survived unimpaired by time and life. Deep lines ran either side from nose to mouth, and the like across his forehead. He had cut himself while shaving that morning, and a large patch of black plaster showed in the centre of his long, prominent chin : as he walked, he now and then lifted a hand to pluck nervously at it ; save in this unconscious gesture, he betrayed no sign of excitement or preoccupation, for, as he walked, he looked about him and once, for a minute, he whistled.

“Awful !” said Lady Eynesford in a whisper.

“He wants a new coat,” said Captain Heseltine.

“He looks rather interesting, I think,” said Alicia.

At this moment a rare and beautiful butterfly fluttered close over Mr. Medland's head. He paused and watched it for a moment. Then he looked carefully round him : no one was in sight : the butterfly settled for a moment on a flower-bed. Mr. Medland looked round again. Then he cautiously lifted his soft hat from his head, wistfully eyed the butterfly, looked round again, suddenly pounced down on his knees, and pressed the hat to the ground. He was very close to the hidden tea-party now, so close that Alicia's suppressed scream of laughter almost betrayed its presence. Mr. Medland put his head down and, raising one corner of the hat, peered under it. Alicia laughed outright, for the butterfly was fluttering in the air above him. Medland did not hear her ; he looked

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up, saw the butterfly, rose to his feet, put on his hat, and exclaimed, in a voice audible by all the listeners—

“Missed it, by heaven!”

“You see the sort of man he is,” observed Lady Eynesford.

“An entomologist, I suppose,” suggested Miss Scaife.

“He chases butterflies in the Governor’s garden, and swears when he doesn’t catch them!”

“He fears not God, neither regards the Governor,” remarked Dick, with a solemn shake of his head.

“Don’t be flippant, Dick,” said Lady Eynesford sharply.

“He might at least brush the knees of his trousers,” moaned Captain Heseltine.

Meanwhile Mr. Medland walked up to the door and rang the bell. He was received by Jackson, the butler; and Jackson was flanked by two foot-

men. Jackson politely concealed his surprise at not seeing a carriage and pair, and stated that his Excellency would receive Mr. Medland at once.

“I hope I haven’t kept him waiting,” answered Medland. “The pony’s lame, and I had to walk.”

The footmen, who were young, raw, and English, almost smiled. A Premier dependent on one pony ! Jackson redoubled his obsequious attention.

The Governor used to say that he wished his wife had imbibed the constitutional spirit as readily as Jackson.

## CHAPTER II.

### A POPULAR DEMONSTRATION.

MISS ELEANOR SCAIFE was *gouvernante des enfants de* New Lindsey ; but she found the duty of looking after two small children, shared as it was with a couple of nurses, not enough to occupy her energies. So she organised the hospitality of Government House, and interested herself in the political problems of a young community. In the course of the latter pursuit, a study of Mr. Medland appeared appropriate and needful, and Miss Scaife was minded to engage in it, in spite of the hostility

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of Lady Eynesford. She had studied Sir Robert Perry for three years, but Sir Robert was disappointing. That he was a charming old gentleman she freely admitted, but he was not in any special way characteristic of a young community. He was just like half-a-hundred members of Parliament whom she had known while she lived with the Eynesfords at home: in fact he was irredeemably European. Accordingly she was glad to see him, but she mentally transferred him to the recreative department, and talked to him about scenery, pictures, and light literature. Lady Eynesford admired Sir Robert because there was no smack of the young community about him; Miss Scaife conceded that point of view, but maintained that there was another: and from that other she ranked Mr. Medland above a thousand Sir Roberts. All this she explained to Alicia Derosne, after Lady Eynesford had retired in dudgeon, and

while the Governor was closeted with the new Premier.

"But," objected Alicia, "Captain Heseltine says——"

"Unless," interrupted Eleanor, "it's something about a coat, I don't care what Captain Heseltine says. He's an authority on that subject, but on no other under the sun."

Alicia abandoned Captain Heseltine's authority and fell back on her sister-in-law's; Eleanor, in spite of the unusual relations of intimate friendship, dating from old school-days, between her employer and herself, could not treat Lady Eynesford's opinion with open disrespect. She drew certain distinctions, which resulted in demonstrating that a close acquaintance between Mr. Medland and Alicia was inadvisable, but that as regards herself the case was different.

"In short," said Alicia, summarising the dis-

tinctions, "you are thirty and I am twenty-two. But I don't want to know the man, only I liked him for hunting that butterfly. I wonder what Miss Medland is like. Captain Heseltine says she's very pretty."

"I don't know."

"Is she out? Oh, but does one come out in New Lindsey?"

"It will be much more convenient if she isn't out," said Miss Scaife, rising and beginning to walk towards the house.

Alicia accompanied her. Before they had gone far, Mr. Medland and Dick Derosne appeared in the drive. The interview was ended, and Dick was escorting Mr. Medland.

"I'm afraid we can't avoid them," said Miss Scaife.

"I'm afraid not," said Alicia. "I wonder what they're talking about."



Mr. Medland's voice, though not loud in ordinary speech, was distinct and penetrating. In a moment Alicia's wonder was satisfied.

"Only be sure you get the right gin," he said.

"Good gracious!" said Alicia. "Is that characteristic of a young community, Eleanor?"

Miss Scaife made no reply. The two parties met, and Mr. Medland was presented. At this instant, Alicia, glancing at the house, thought she saw a disapproving face at Lady Eynesford's window; but it seemed hardly likely that the Governor's wife would be watching the Premier out of the window. Alicia wondered whether they had met in the house; Miss Scaife felt no doubt that they had not. She knew that Lady Eynesford's surrender would be a matter of time.

"Well," she said, "are we to congratulate you, Mr. Medland?"

"I believe my tongue is supposed to be sealed for the time," he answered, smiling.

"Mine isn't," laughed Dick, "and I think you may offer him your felicitations."

"You think it, yourself, a subject for congratulation?" asked Eleanor, getting to work at once.

"Oh, Eleanor!" protested Alicia. "Poor Mr. Medland!"

Medland glanced from one to the other, smiling again.

"Whatever may be the sacrifice of personal inclination involved," he began solemnly, "when the Governor calls on me I have no——"

"You're making fun of us," said Alicia, seeing the twinkle in his eye.

"I am quoting Mr.—Sir Robert Perry's speech when he last came in."

"Sir Robert is a great friend of mine," declared Alicia.

"Seriously," said Medland, turning to Eleanor, "I am very pleased."

"Why?" she asked. "The responsibility must be frightful."

Alicia and Dick laughed irreverently.

"Eleanor's always talking about responsibility," said the former. "I hate the idea of it, don't you, Mr. Medland?"

"Call it power and try then," he answered.

"Power? Oh, but I have none!"

"No?" he asked, with a look that made Alicia think he might have been "nice" when he was a young man.

"Oh, of course, if it's mere ambition—" began Eleanor impatiently.

"Not altogether," he interposed.

"Then what else?"

"Listen!" he said, holding up his hand.

They were now within twenty or thirty yards of

the road, and, listening, they heard the murmur of many voices. Government House stood on the shore of the bay, about half a mile outside the town, and a broad road ran by the gates which, on reaching Kirton, was merged in one of the main thoroughfares, Victoria Street.

Another turn brought the party in the garden in sight of the road. It was thronged with people for a considerable distance, people in a thick mass, surging up against the gate and hardly held back by a cordon of police.

"Whatever can be the matter?" exclaimed Eleanor.

"I am the matter," said Medland. "They have heard about it."

When the crowd saw him, cheer after cheer rang out, caps and handkerchiefs were waved, and even flags made a sudden appearance. Moving a pace in advance of his companions, he lifted his

hat, and the enthusiastic cries burst forth with renewed vigour. He signed to them to be still, but they did not heed him. Alicia caught hold of Eleanor's hand, her breath coming and going in sudden gasps. Eleanor looked at Medland. He was moistening his lips, and she saw a little quiver run through his limbs.

"By Jove!" said Dick Derosne.

Medland turned to Eleanor, and pointed to the crowd.

"Yes, I see," she said.

He held out his hand to bid them farewell, and walked on towards the gate. They stood and watched his progress. Suddenly a different cry rose.

"Let her pass! Let her pass! Let her through to him!"

The crowd slowly parted, and down the middle of the road, amid the raising of hats and pretty

rough compliments, a young girl came walking swiftly and proudly, with a smile on her lips.

"It's his daughter," whispered Alicia. "Oh!"

Medland opened the gate and went out. The girl, her fair hair blowing out behind her and her cheeks glowing red, ran to meet him, and, as he stooped and kissed her, the crowd, having, as a crowd, but one way to tell its feelings, roared and cheered again. Medland, with one hand on his daughter's shoulder and the other holding his hat, walked down the lane between human walls, and was lost to sight as the walls found motion and closed in behind him.

After some moments' silence Dick Derosne recovered himself, and remarked with a cynical air,

"Neat bit of acting—kissing the girl and all that."

But Alicia would not have it. With a tremulous laugh, she said,

"I should like to have kissed him too. Oh, Eleanor, I didn't know it was like that!"

Perhaps Eleanor did not either, but she would not admit it. What was it but a lot of ignorant people cheering they knew not what? If anything, it was degrading. Yet, in spite of these most reasonable reflections, she knew that her cheeks had flushed and her heart beat at the sight and the sound.

They were still standing and watching the crowd as it retreated towards Kirton, when the Governor, who had come out to get some fresh air after his arduous labour, joined them.

"Extraordinary the popularity of the man in Kirton," he observed, in answer to Alicia's eager description of Mr. Medland's triumph.

"What has he done for them?" asked Eleanor.

"Done? Oh, I don't know. He's done some-

thing, I suppose ; but it's what he's going to do that they're so keen about."

"Is he a Socialist?" inquired Alicia.

"I can't tell you," replied Lord Eynesford. "I don't know what he is—and I'm not sure I know what a Socialist is. Ask Eleanor."

"A Socialist," began Eleanor, in an authoritative tone, "is——"

But this much-desired definition was unhappily lost, for a footman came up and told Lord Eynesford that his wife would like to see him if he were disengaged.

The Governor smiled grimly, winked imperceptibly, and departed.

"It's been quite an entertaining day," said Miss Scaife. "But I'm very sorry for Sir Robert."

"What was Mr. Medland talking to you about, Dick?" asked Alicia.

"Oh, a new sort of drink. You take a long



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glass, and some pounded ice and some gin—only you must be careful to get——”

“I don’t want to hear about it.”

“Well, you asked, you know,” retorted Dick, with the air of a man who suffers under the perpetual illogicality of woman.

## CHAPTER III.

### HOSPITALITY *EX OFFICIO*.

"I CONFESS to being very much alarmed," said Mr. Kilshaw, "and I think Capital generally shares the feeling."

"If I thought he could last, I should share it myself," said Sir Robert Perry.

"He may easily last long enough to half ruin my business. Large concerns are delicate concerns."

"Come, Kilshaw, Puttock's a capitalist ; he'll see Capital isn't wronged."

"Puttock is all very well in his way ; but what do you say to Jewell and Norburn ?"

"Jewell's an old-style Radical : he won't do you much harm. You hit the nail on the head when you mention Norburn. Norburn would be very pleased to run your factory as a State work-shop for two pound a week."

"And pickings," added Mr. Kilshaw, with scornful emphasis.

A third gentleman, who was sitting near in the large bow-window of the Central Club, an elderly man, with short-clipped white hair and a pleasant face, joined in the talk.

"Norburn ? Why, is that the fellow I tried ? Is he in Medland's Government ?"

"That's the man, Sir John," answered Kilshaw ; and Sir Robert added,

"You gave him three months for inciting to riot in the strike at the Collieries two years ago. He's

made Minister of Public Works; I hear the Governor held out for a long while, but Medland insisted."

"And my works are to be Public Works, I suppose," grumbled Kilshaw, finding some comfort in this epigrammatic statement of the unwelcome prospect before him.

"Red-hot, isn't he?" asked Sir John Oakapple, who, as Chief Justice of the colony, had sent the new Minister to gaol.

Kilshaw nodded.

"Will he and Puttock pull together?" continued the Chief Justice.

"The hopeful part of the situation is," said Sir Robert, "that Puttock is almost bound to fall out with somebody, either with Norburn, for the reason you name, or with Coxon, because Coxon will try to rule the roast, or with Medland himself."

“Why should he quarrel with Medland?”

“Why does the heir quarrel with the king? Besides, there’s the Prohibition Question. I doubt if Medland will satisfy Puttock and his people over that.”

“Oh, I expect he will,” said the Chief Justice. “I asked him once—this is in confidence, you know—if he didn’t think it a monstrous proposal, and he only shrugged those slouched shoulders of his, and said, ‘We’ve got Sunday Closing, and we go in the back way: if we have Prohibition the drink ’ll go in the back way—same principle, my dear Chief Justice’”: and that High Officer finished his anecdote with a laugh.

“The odd thing about Medland is,” remarked Sir Robert, “that he’s utterly indifferent about everything except what he’s utterly mad about. He has no moderate sympathies or antipathies.”

"Therefore he's a most dangerous man," said Kilshaw.

"Oh, I think he sympathises, in moderation, with morality," laughed Sir John.

"Ay," rejoined Perry quickly, "and that's all. What if Puttock raised the Righteous on him?"

"Oh, then I should stand by Medland," said the Chief Justice decisively. "And young Coxon's to be Attorney-General. He's safe enough."

"A man who thinks only about himself is generally safe," remarked Sir Robert dryly; and he added, with a smile, "That's why lawyers are such a valuable class."

The Chief Justice laughed, and took his revenge by asking,

"How many windows did they break, Perry?"

"Only three," rejoined the Ex-Premier. "Considering the popular enthusiasm I got off cheap."

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"You can't stir a people's heart for nothing. All the same, the reception they gave him was a fine sight."

"Extraordinary, wasn't it?"

"I call it most ominous," said Mr. Kilshaw, and he rose and went out gloomily.

"I haven't had my invitation to meet them at Government House yet," said the Chief Justice.

He referred to the banquet which the Governor was accustomed to give to a new Ministry, when the leading officials of the colony were always included in the party.

Sir Robert looked round for possible eavesdroppers.

"There's a hitch," he said in a low voice. "Lady Eynesford makes difficulties about having Medland."

"Oh, that's nonsense!"

"Utter nonsense ; but it seems she does. How-

ever, I suppose you'll get your card in a day or two."

"And renew my acquaintance with Mr. Norburn under happier circumstances."

"Norburn will feel as one used to when one breakfasted with the school-master—as a peace-making after another sort of interview."

Sir Robert Perry proved right in supposing that Lady Eynesford's resistance could not last for ever. It was long enough and fierce enough to make the Governor very unhappy and the rest of the family very uncomfortable, but it was foredoomed to failure. Even the Bishop of Kirton, whom she consulted, told her that high place had its peculiar duties, and that however deplorable the elevation of such a man might be, if the Queen's representative invited him to join his counsels, the Queen's representative's wife must invite him to join her dinner-party: and the Bishop proved the



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sincerity of his constitutional doctrine by accepting an invitation to meet the new Ministry. Lady Eynesford, abandoned by Church and State alike, surrendered, thanking heaven that Daisy Medland's youth postponed another distasteful necessity.

"You'll have to face it in a few months' time," said Eleanor Scaife, who was not always as comforting a companion as a lady in her position is supposed to be.

"Oh, they'll be out in a month," answered Lady Eynesford confidently. "The Bishop says they can't last. Do you know, Eleanor, Mr. Coxon is the only Churchman among them?"

"Shocking!" said Eleanor, with no more suspicion of irony than her reputation as an *esprit fort* demanded. It really startled her a little: the social significance seemed considerable.

Mr. Medland's invitation to dinner caused him perhaps more perturbation than had his invitation

to power. A natural sensitiveness of mind supplied in him the place of an experience of refined society or an impulse of inherited pride. He cared nothing that his advent to office alarmed and displeased many; but it gave him pain to be compelled to dine at the table of a lady who, by notorious report, did not desire his company.

"I don't want to go, and she doesn't want to have me," he protested to his daughter; "yet she must have me and I must go. The great god Sham again, Daisy."

"You'll meet him everywhere now," said Daisy, with a melancholy shake of her young head.

"And rout him somewhere?"

"Oh yes, everywhere—except at Government House."

"I hate going."

"I believe mother would have liked it. Don't you think so, dear?"

"Perhaps. Should you?"

"I should be terribly afraid of Lady Eynesford."

"Just my feeling," said Medland, stroking his chin.

When he entered the drawing-room at Government House, and was presented to his hostess by the Governor, on whose brow rested a little pucker of anxiety, Lady Eynesford was talking to the Bishop and to Mr. Puttock. Puttock had accepted the office of Minister of Trade and Customs, but not without grumbling, for he had aspired to control the finances of the colony as Treasurer, and considered that Medland underrated his influence as a political leader. He was a short man, rather stout, with large whiskers; he wore a blue ribbon in the button-hole of his dress-coat. Lady Eynesford considered him remarkably like a grocer, and the very quintessence of nonconformity; but he at least was indisputably respectable, a devoted

husband, and the father of a large family, behind whose ranks he was in the habit of walking to chapel twice every Sunday. Sometimes he preached when he got there. Just to his right, talking briskly to Alicia Derosne, stood Mr. Coxon, the Attorney-General, very smart in English-made clothes, and discussing the doings of people at home whom he had known or seen in the days when he was at Cambridge, and had the run of a rich uncle's house in Park Lane. In the distance the Roman Catholic Archbishop was talking to Eleanor Scaife, and suffering Sir John Oakapple's jests with a polite faint smile. This mixture of the sects ranked high among the trials of Lady Eynesford's position, and contained precious opportunities for Miss Scaife's inquiring mind.

It seems true beyond question that moral estimation counts for more in the likings of women than in those of men. Medland, in spite of the utter

insignificance, as he conceived, of the lady's judgment considered as an intellectual process, was too much of a politician, and perhaps a little too much of a man also, not to wish to conciliate the Governor's wife; but his courteous deference, his clever talk, and his search for points of sympathy broke ineffectually on the barriers of Lady Eynesford's official politeness and personal reserve. She was cruel in her clear indication of the footing upon which they met, and the Governor's uneasy glance of appeal would produce nothing better than a cold interest in the scenery of the Premier's constituency. Medland was glad when Lady Eynesford turned to the Chief Justice and released him; his relief was so great that it was hardly marred by finding Mrs. Puttock on his other side. Yet Mrs. Puttock and he were not congenial spirits.

"We are sending a deputation to you," said Mrs.

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Puttock, directly Medland's change of position gave her an opportunity.

He emptied his glass of champagne, and asked,

"Which of your many 'We's,' Mrs. Puttock?"

"Why, the W.T.A.A."

"I won't affect ignorance—Women's—Total—Abstinence—Association."

"The enthusiasm this afternoon was enormous. Of course Mr. Puttock could not be there; but I told them I felt sure that with the new Ministry an era of real hope had dawned," and Mrs. Puttock looked inquiringly at the Premier, who was in his turn looking at the foaming wine that fell into his glass from Jackson's practised hand.

"A new era?" he answered. "Oh, well, you didn't get much out of Perry. What do you want of me?"

"We want to strengthen your hands in dealing drastically with the problem. Of course, it will be one of your first measures."

"We have at least six first measures already on the list," remarked the Premier, smiling.

"I saw your daughter to-day," Mrs. Puttock continued. "I went to ask her to join us."

"Isn't she rather young to join things?" pleaded Mr. Medland. "Poor child! She would hardly understand what she's giving—I mean, what she's going in for. What did she say?"

"Well, really, Mr. Medland, I think you might speak a word to her. She told me she loved champagne and tipsy-cake. The tipsy-cake doesn't matter, because it can be made without alcohol.—I beg your pardon?"

"I didn't speak," said the Premier.

"But champagne! At her age!"

"She's only tasted it half-a-dozen times."

"Well, I hope every one will have to give it up soon. My husband says that the Cabinet——"

"Here's treason! Has he been telling you our secrets?"

"Secrets! Why, two-thirds of the party are pledged——"

But here Lady Eynesford again claimed the Premier's attention, and he was really glad of it.

Dick Derosne walked home with Mr. Medland. He had intended to go only to the gate, but Medland pressed him to go further, and, engrossed in conversation, they reached Medland's house without separating.

"Come in and see Daisy," said Medland. "She's been alone all the evening, poor girl, and will be glad of better company than mine."

"Oh, come, I expect she likes your society better than any one else's."

"Well, that won't last long, will it?"



They went in and found Daisy supping on the wing of a chicken, and some wine-and-water. Medland led the way, and, as soon as his daughter saw him, she exclaimed,

"Was it very awful, father?"

"Well, was it, Mr. Derosne?" he asked of Dick. "Daisy, this is the Governor's brother, Mr. Derosne."

"It was awful!" said Dick, executing his bow. "Those great feeds always are."

"Why, Daisy," exclaimed Mr. Medland, "you're drinking wine. How about Mrs. Puttock?"

"Oh, she told you? She said it was very wicked."

"And you?"

"Oh, I said it wasn't, because you did it."

"Luckily, a conclusion may be right, though the reason for it is utterly wrong," said the Premier.

"I," said Dick, "always admit things are wicked,

you know, and say I do 'em all the same. It saves a lot of argument."

The door opened and Mr. Norburn walked in.

"Is it too late for me to come?" he asked.

"Of course not," said Daisy, greeting him with evident pleasure, and ensconcing him in an arm-chair. "We expect you to come at all the odd times. That's the part of an intimate friend, isn't it, Mr. Derosne?"

Medland was speaking to Norburn, and Dick took the opportunity of remarking,

"Mayn't I come at an odd time now and then?"

"Oh do. We shall be so pleased."

"Mr. Norburn doesn't come at all of them, does he?"

"At most. Do you mind that?"

"Of course I do. Who wouldn't?"

"I don't."

"No, if you did I shouldn't."

Dick was, it must be admitted, getting along very well, considering that he had only been presented to the young lady ten minutes before. That was Dick's way ; and when the young lady is attractive, it is a way that has many recommendations, only sometimes it leads to a pitfall—a cold answer, or a snub.

"But why," asked Daisy, in apparent surprise, "should you mind about what I thought? I'm afraid I should never think about whether you liked it or not, you know."

"Good-night," said Dick. And when he got outside and was lighting his cigar, he exclaimed, "Confound the girl!" And after a pause he added, "Hang the fellow!" and shook his head and went home.

## CHAPTER IV.

### WEEDING OUT THE WEAK-KNEED.

IN a short time it happened that Lady Eynesford conceived a high opinion of Mr. Coxon. He was, she declared, the one bright spot in the new Ministry; he possessed ability, principle, sound Churchmanship, and gentlemanly demeanour. A young man thus equipped could hardly fail of success, and Lady Eynesford, in spite of the Governor's decidedly lukewarm approbation, was pleased to take the Attorney-General under her special protection. More than once in the next week or two did Mr. Coxon, tall-hatted, frock-

coated, and new-gloved, in obedience to cordial invitations, take tea in the verandah of Government House. He was naturally gratified by these attentions, and, being not devoid of ambition, soon began to look upon his position as the starting-point for a greater prize. Lady Eynesford was, here again, with him—up to a point. She thought (and thoughts are apt to put themselves with a bluntness which would be inexcusable in speech) that it was high time that Eleanor Scaife was married, and, from an abstract point of view, this could hardly be denied. Lady Eynesford took the next step. Eleanor and Coxon would suit one another to perfection. Hence the invitations to tea, and Lady Eynesford's considerate withdrawals into the house, or out of sight in the garden. Of course it was impossible to gauge Eleanor's views at this early stage, but Lady Eynesford was assured of Mr. Coxon's gratitude—his bearing left no doubt

of it—and she congratulated herself warmly on the promising and benevolent scheme which she had set afoot.

Now the danger of encouraging ambitious young men—and this remark is general in its scope, and not confined at all to one subject-matter—is that their vaulting imaginations constantly overleap the benevolence of their patrons. Mr. Coxon would not have been very grateful for permission to make love to Miss Scaife; he was extremely grateful for the opportunity of recommending himself to Alicia Derosne. The Governor's sister—none less—became by degrees his aim and object, and when Lady Eynesford left him with Miss Scaife, hoping that Alicia would have the sense not to get in the way, Mr. Coxon's soaring mind regarded himself as left with Alicia, and he hoped that the necessary exercise of discretion would be forthcoming from Miss Scaife. Presently this little comedy

revealed itself to Eleanor, and, after an amused glance at the retreating figure of her misguided friend, she would bury herself in *Tomes on the British Colonies*, and abandon Alicia to the visitor's wiles. A little indignant at the idea of being "married off" in this fashion, she did not feel it incumbent on her to open Lady Eynesford's eyes. As for Alicia—Alicia laughed, and thought that young men were much the same all the world over.

"Tomes," said Eleanor on one occasion, looking up from the first volume of that author—and perhaps she chose her passage with malice—"clearly intimates his opinion that the Empire can't hold together unless the social bonds between England and the colonies are strengthened."

"Does he, dear?" said Alicia, playing with the pug. "Do look at his tongue, Mr. Coxon. Isn't it charming?"

“Yes. Listen to this: ‘It is on every ground to be regretted that the divorce between society at home and in the colonies is so complete. The ties of common interest and personal friendship, which, impalpable though they be, bind nations together more closely than constitutions and laws, are to a great extent wanting. Even the interchange of visits is rare ; closer connection by inter-marriage, in a broad view, non-existent.’ ”

“There’s a great deal of sense in that,” said Coxon.

“Well, Mr. Coxon,” laughed Alicia, “you should have thought of it when you were in England.”

Eleanor’s eyes had dropped again to Tomes, and Mr. Coxon answered, in a tone not calculated to disturb the reader,

“I hope it’s not altogether too late.”

“The choice is so small out here, isn’t it? Now,



according to Tomes, Mr. Medland ought to marry a duchess—well, a dowager-duchess—but there isn't one."

"I should hardly have thought the Premier quite the man for a duchess," said Coxon, rather superciliously.

"Well, I like him much better than most dukes I've seen. Why do you shake your head?"

"I've the greatest respect for Mr. Medland as my leader, but—come, Miss Derosne, he's hardly—now is he?"

"I like him very much indeed," declared Alicia. "I think he's the most interesting man I've ever met."

"But thinking a man interesting and thinking him a man one would like to marry are quite different, surely?" suggested fastidious Mr. Coxon.

"Thinking him interesting and thinking him a man one would be *likely* to marry are quite different," corrected Eleanor, emerging from Tones.

"By the way, who was Mrs. Medland?" asked Alicia.

Coxon hesitated for a moment: Eleanor raised her eyes.

"I believe her name was Benyon," he answered.  
"I—I know nothing about her."

"Didn't you know her?"

"No, I was in England, and she died a year after I came back—before I went into politics at all."

"I wonder if she was nice."

"My dear Alicia, what can it matter?" asked Eleanor.

"If you come to that, Eleanor, most of the things we talk about don't matter," protested

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Alicia. "We are not Attorney-Generals, like Mr. Coxon, whose words are worth — how much?"

"Now, Miss Derosne, you're chaffing me."

"Come and feed the swans," said Alicia, rising.

"What will Mary think?" said Eleanor, settling herself down again to Tomes. "And why is Alicia so curious about the Medlands?"

It was perhaps natural that Eleanor should be puzzled to answer the question she put to herself, but in reality the interest Alicia felt admitted of easy explanation. She had first encountered Medland under conditions which invested him with all the attraction that a visibly dominant character exercises over a young mind, and the impression then created had been of late much deepened by what she heard from her brother. Dick felt that the Governor would be a cold, and

Lady Eynesford a thoroughly unfavourable, auditor of his views on the Medlands, but, in spite of Daisy's cruel indifference, he had taken advantage of her permission to pay her more than one visit, and he poured out his soul to his sister. His outpourings consisted of enthusiastic praises of both father and daughter.

"By Jove!" he said, "it's simply—you know, Al—simply fetching to see them together. He's a splendid chap—not an ounce of side or nonsense about him. And she's awfully pretty. Don't you think she's awfully pretty, Al?"

"I only saw her for a moment, dear."

"It's too bad of Mary to go on as she does. She simply ignores Miss Medland."

"Miss Medland's still very young, Dick. Is he—how does he treat her?"

"I don't know. It's almost funny—they're always jumping up to get one another things,

don't you know!" answered Dick, whose feelings outran his powers of elegant description.

"Do you go there much, Dick?"

"Now, Al, don't try to do Mary to me."

Alicia laughed.

"I think Mary will 'do' as much 'Mary' to you as you want, if you don't take care, you foolish boy. But, Dick, tell me. How do Willie and Mr. Medland get on?"

"Oh, pretty well, but— You won't tell?"

Alicia promised secrecy, and Dick, conscious of criminality, lowered his voice and continued,

"I believe there's a row on in the Cabinet already. Willie said Puttock and Jewell were at loggerheads with Norburn, and Medland was inclined to back Norburn."

"And Mr. Coxon?"

"He's supposed to be lying low. And then I was down at the Club and met old Oakapple there,

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and he told me that Kilshaw had boasted of having done a deal with Puttock."

"What did he mean?"

"Why, that he and his gang—the rich capitalists, you know—were to back up old Puttock's temperance measures, provided Puttock (and Jewell, if Puttock could nobble him) prevented Medland from bringing in—what the deuce was it?—some Socialistic labour legislation or other—I forget what. Anyhow the Chief Justice thought Perry would be back soon."

"What? That Mr. Medland would be turned out? What a shame! He hasn't had a fair chance, has he?"

The gossip which Dick had picked up was not very wide of the mark. It was perhaps too early to talk of absolute dissensions, but it was tolerably well known that a struggle was likely to occur in the Cabinet, nominally on the question of the

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relative priority to be given to different measures, more truly perhaps on the issue whether the advanced labour party, represented by Norburn, or the Radicals of the older type, headed by Puttock and Jewell, were to control the policy of the Premier and the Government. The latter section was inextricably connected, and, in its *personnel*, almost identical with the party who set the Prohibition question above and before all other matters. The concrete form taken by this conflict of abstract principles seemed likely to be—should the Government begin with a Temperance measure, or should it, in the first place, proceed to give to Labour that drastic Factory and Workshop Act which Norburn had advocated and Medland accepted, and which would, Mr. Kilshaw declared, reduce every manufacturer to the position of a slave of Government and a pauper to boot, would drive capital from the colony, and shut up every

mill in New Lindsey? Now Mr. Kilshaw would, if he were reduced to choose, rather close the public-houses than the mills. So he told Sir Robert Perry, who was very quiet, but very watchful just now; and the story was that Sir Robert said, "Puttock has got shares in the Southern Sea Mill—and Puttock's a Prohibition man," and refused to say any more; but that was enough—so the talk ran—to send Mr. Kilshaw straight to Puttock's hall-door.

These public matters gave Mr. Coxon much food for thought. His own attitude was, at present, considered to be one of neutrality towards the rival factions in the Government. He was in the habit of defining his aim in political life as being a steady and gradual removal of obstacles to the progress of the colony; to attain complete truth, it was only necessary to alter the definition by substituting "Mr. Coxon" for "the colony"; and the question



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which now occupied him was how he might best secure the best possible position for himself, without, as he hastened to protest, abandoning his principles. He disliked Puttock, and he was envious of Norburn, who threatened to supplant him as the "rising man" of his party. Should he help Puttock to remove Norburn, or lend Norburn a hand in ousting Puttock?

Down to the very week before the Legislative Assembly met, Mr. Medland kept his own counsel, disclosing his mind not even to his colleagues. Then he called a Cabinet, and listened to the conflicting views set forth by Puttock and Norburn.

"And what do you say, Mr. Coxon?" he asked, when Puttock's vehement harangue came to an end.

"I shall follow your judgment implicitly," replied Mr. Coxon, with touching fidelity.

"I feel bound to state," said Mr. Puttock, "and I believe I speak for my friend Jewell also" (Mr. Jewell nodded), "that with us priority for Temperance legislation and a cautious policy in imposing hampering restrictions on commercial undertakings are of vital moment. We cannot agree to give way on either point."

"And you, Norburn?" asked Medland, turning to his devoted follower, and smiling a kindly smile.

Norburn was about to speak, when Puttock broke in,

"It is best that the Premier should understand our position; what we have stated is absolutely essential to our continuance in the Government."

Mr. Medland thought that the function of a follower was to follow, and of a leader to lead. He always found it difficult to put up with opposition, and patience was not among whatever qualities of statesmanship he possessed.

Drumming gently on the table, he said,

"Oh, no Temperance this session. We'll give 'em a Labour session." He paused, and added, "And give it 'em hot and strong."

So that evening Puttock and Jewell resigned, and the Cabinet, meeting the House shorn and maimed, was established in power by the magnificent majority of ten.

"If so soon as this I'm done for,  
I wonder what I was begun for!"

quoted Sir John Oakapple. "If they never agreed at all, what did they take office together for?"

"The screw," suggested Captain Heseltine.

"Then why haven't they stuck to it?"

Silence met this question, and the Chief Justice turned a look of bland inquiry on Mr. Kilshaw.

Mr. Kilshaw coughed and turned the pages of the *Kirton World*.

The Chief Justice winked at Dick Derosne, and

said that it was refreshing to see there were still men who would sacrifice office to conviction.

“Oh, uncommon, Sir John,” said Dick Derosne, and these cynics, having done entire injustice to two deeply sincere men, went off and joined in a game of pool. The Chief Justice took the pool.

## CHAPTER V.

### A TALK AT A DANCE.

IMMEDIATELY after the Assembly had so narrowly confirmed Mr. Medland's position, it adjourned for a fortnight in order to allow time for the reorganisation of the Government, and the preparation of its legislative projects. The Governor seized the opportunity and started on a shooting expedition, accompanied by his wife. His absence somewhat diminished the *éclat* of Sir John Oakapple's dance, but nevertheless it was agreed to be a very brilliant affair. Everybody came, for Sir John's position invited hospitality to all parties alike, and the host,

as became a well-to-do bachelor, provided a sumptuous entertainment. Even Mr. Medland was there, for it was his daughter's first public appearance, and he and Sir Robert Perry had interchanged some friendly remarks on the existing crisis.

"I suppose I mustn't ask who you're going to give us instead of your deserters," said Sir Robert jokingly.

"Oh," answered Medland, "I'm going to fill up with Labour men. I haven't quite fixed on the men yet."

"Then you'll be all one colour—all red? But I must congratulate you on your daughter's *début*. She and Miss Derosne are the *belles* of the evening."

Then Sir Robert, in his pretty way, must needs be led up to Daisy Medland and dance a quadrille with her, apologising politely to Dick Derosne, who had arranged to sit out the said quadrille with

the same lady, and became a violent anti-Perryite on the spot.

Alicia passed on Mr. Coxon's arm, and stopped for a moment to condole.

"I didn't know Premiers danced," she said, and perhaps her glance conveyed a shy invitation to Medland.

"If I ask you now, I shall have another secession," he replied, smiling at Coxon. "Besides, I can't dance."

"You must sit out with me then," she said, growing bolder. "You don't mind, do you, Mr. Coxon?"

Coxon and Dick were left to console one another, and Alicia sat down with Medland. At first he was silent, watching his daughter. When the quadrille ended, he rose and said,

"Come into the garden."

"But my partner for the next won't be able to find me."

"Well, supposing he can't?" said the Premier.

"It makes one very conceited to be a Premier," thought Alicia, but she went into the garden.

Then began what she declared to herself was the most interesting conversation to which she had ever listened. From silence, the Premier passed to a remark here and there, thence to a conversation, thence, as the evening went on and they strolled further and further away from the house, into a monologue on his life and aims and hopes. Young man after young man sought her in vain, or, finding the pair, feared to intrude and retired in discontent, while Medland strove to draw the picture of that far-off society whose bringing-near was his goal in public life. She wondered if he talked to other women like that: and she found herself hoping that he did not. His gaunt form seemed to fill and his sunk eyes to spring out to meet the light, as he painted for her the time when



his dreams should have clothed themselves with the reality which his persuasive imagination almost gave them now.

Then he suddenly turned on himself.

"And I might have done something," he said ;  
"but I've wasted most of my life."

"Wasted it?" she echoed in a wondering question.

"I don't know why I talk about it to-night, still less why I talk about it to you. I talked about it last to—to my wife."

"Ah! But your daughter?"

"Daisy!" he laughed tenderly. "Poor little Daisy! I don't bother her with it all." Then he added, "Really I've no business to bother you either, Miss Derosne. I break out sometimes. I'm afraid I'm not 'a silent, strong man.' Does it bore you?"

"You know—you know—" Alicia stammered.

“And now,” he said, rising in his excitement, “even now, what have I? The place—the form—the name of power; and these creatures hold me back and hang on my flank and—I can do nothing.” He sank back on the bench where she sat.

Alicia put her hand out and drew it back. Then she stretched it out again, and laid it on his arm.

“I am so sorry,” she said, and her voice faltered. “Oh, if I could—but how absurd!”

Medland turned suddenly and looked her in the face.

“You will help some one,” he answered, “some better man. And I—I beg your pardon. Come.”

Alicia asked herself afterwards if she ought to be ashamed of what she did then. She caught the Premier by the arm, and said,

“But I want to stay with you.” And then she sat trembling to hear his answer.

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For a moment he did not answer. He passed his hand over his brow ; then he smiled sadly.

"Nearly twenty years ago a woman said that to me," he said. "But she—well, it wasn't to talk politics."

"Oh, to call it *talking politics!*" she answered, with a little gasping laugh.

With another swift turn of his head, he bent his eyes on hers. She turned her head away, and neither spoke. Alicia played nervously with one glove which she had stripped off, while Medland gravely watched her face, beautiful in its pure outline and quivering with unwonted emotions. With a start he roused himself.

"Come," he said imperiously, offering his arm. She took it, and, without more words, they turned towards the house.

They had not gone far, when Eleanor Scaife met them. She was walking quickly, looking

round as she went, as though in search. When she saw them she started, and cried,

“Oh, I want you, Alicia.”

Medland immediately drew aside, and with a bow took his way. Alicia, calming herself with an effort, asked what was the matter.

“Why, it’s that wretched brother of yours. I really do not know what Mary will say. I shall be afraid——”

“But what has Dick done?”

“Done? Why he’s danced six dances out of eight with that Medland child. The whole room’s talking about them.”

“Eight dances? There can’t have been eight dances?”

“Don’t be silly,” said Eleanor sharply. “I suppose you danced? No! I remember I didn’t see you. Where have *you* been?”

“I—I’ve been sitting out,”

“Not—not—Alicia, with one man? Worse and——”

“Yes.”

“Mr. Coxon, then, I hope? At least he’s safe.”

“No.”

“Who then?”

“I don’t know why you should ask——”

“Alicia! Was it—?” exclaimed Eleanor, with a gesture towards where she had found her friend.

“Mr. Medland? Yes,” answered Alicia. And, in her effort to exclude timidity, she infused into her voice a note of defiance.

Eleanor sat down on the nearest seat. Surprise dominated her faculties. Dick’s behaviour was reprehensible, but, given such creatures as young men, natural. But Alicia? The thing was too surprising to cause uneasiness.

“Well, you are a queer child! Here’s all the room looking for you to dance with you, and you

go and sit in the garden with a politician of five-and-forty! What in the world were you doing?"

"Talking politics," said Alicia, now quite calmly.

"And you've been here since——?"

"The first quadrille."

"Six mortal dances!" said Eleanor, in an envious tone. Alicia had had a grand opportunity. "Did you remember to ask him about that description of the Cabinet meetings in Tomes? You remember we agreed to?"

"I'm afraid I forgot, dear."

"Oh, how stupid of you! If I'd been—but good gracious! I forgot Dick. Do come, Alicia, and get him away from her. We seem to have nothing but Medlands to-night!"

The first person they met inside the ball-room was Mr. Coxon. He was enveloped in gloom. Alicia's conscience smote her.

"Oh!" she cried, "I forgot Mr. Coxon! I must go and scold him for not coming for me. Nonsense, Eleanor! I can't help about Dick," and, shaking off Miss Scaife's detaining hand, she went to play the usual imposture.

Eleanor looked round in bewilderment. Seeing Lady Perry, she was struck with an idea, crossed the room, and joined the ex-Premier's smiling, pleasant wife. Lady Perry had noticed enough to be *au fait* with the situation at a word. She rose and went to where Medland was now leaning listlessly against the wall. She spoke a word to him; he started, smiled, and shrugged his shoulders.

"I know you'll forgive me. One can't be too careful," she urged. "No one can be father and mother both."

Mr. Medland beckoned to his daughter; she came to him, Dick standing a few feet off.

“Whenever, Daisy,” said Medland, “a thing is pleasant, one must not, in this world, have much of it. Is that the gospel, Lady Perry?”

“You’ll make young Mr. Derosne too conceited, my dear,” whispered Lady Perry, very kindly; but she favoured Dick, who knew well that he was a sinner, with a severe glance.

Thus Eleanor Scaife, having rid her party of the Medlands—for the moment, as she impatiently added—was at liberty to listen to the conversation of Mrs. Puttock. Mrs. Puttock was always most civil to any of the Government House party, and she entertained Eleanor, who resolutely refused all invitations to dance, with plenty of gossip. Amidst their talk and the occasional interruptions of men who joined and left them, the evening wore away, and Eleanor had just signed to Alicia to make ready to go, when Mrs. Puttock touched on the Premier, who was visible across the room, chatting



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merrily with his host, and laughing heartily at the Chief Justice's stories.

"The Premier seems in good spirits," said Mrs. Puttock, a little acidly.

"Oh, I expect he's only bearing up in public," laughed Eleanor. "But there certainly is a great change in him since I first recollect him."

"Indeed, Miss Scaife."

"Yes," said Eleanor, rising, for she saw Alicia approaching under Captain Heseltine's escort. "It was about the Jubilee time. He seemed then quite overcome with grief at the loss of his wife. Ah, here's Alicia!"

"Wife!" exclaimed Mrs. Puttock, bestowing on Eleanor a look of deep significance. "It's my belief he never had a wife."

Eleanor started.

"What do you mean?" she began, but she checked herself when she found that Alicia was

close beside her. She hastily bade Mrs. Puttock good-night.

"I mean what I say," observed that lady, with an emphatic nod. Eleanor escaped in bewilderment.

"Who never had a wife?" asked Alicia, with a laugh, as they were putting on their cloaks.

After a moment's pause, Eleanor answered,

"Sir John Oakapple," and she excused this deviation from truth by the sage reflection that girls like Alicia must not be told everything.

"We all know that," commented Alicia, contemptuously. "I hoped it was something interesting."

Eleanor enjoyed a smile in the sheltering gloom of the carriage. She felt very discreet.

## CHAPTER VI.

### A CANDIDATE FOR OFFICE.

THE Premier sent his daughter home alone in a fly and walked with Coxon, whose road lay the same way. As they went, they talked of plans and prospects, and Medland unconsciously exasperated his companion by praising Norburn's character and capacity.

"Depend upon it, he's the coming man of New Lindsey," he said. "He thinks the world will get better sooner than it will, you may say. Well, perhaps I share that illusion. Anyhow he has enthusiasm and grit, and I love his utter disinterestedness."

Coxon acquiesced coldly in his rival's praises.

"That," continued Medland, "is where we have the pull. Who is there to follow Perry? Now Norburn is ready to step into my shoes the moment I'm gone, or—or come to grief."

They had reached Digby Square, a large open place, laid out with walks and trees, and named after Sir Jabez Digby, K.B., first Governor of New Lindsey. The Premier paused to light a cigar. Coxon watched him with a morose frown; he was angry and envious at Medland's disregard of the pretensions which he thought his own achievements justified. Though he was conscious that it would be wisest to say nothing, he could not help observing,

"Well, I hope it will be a long time before I am asked to change service under you for service under Norburn."

Medland's quick ear caught the note of anger.

"Well," he said, "it's ill prophesying. Time brings its own leaders. I know Norburn and you will work loyally together anyhow, whatever positions you hold to one another."

This polite concession did not appease Coxon.

"There is much that I distrust in his methods and aims," he remarked.

"I mustn't listen to this, my dear fellow."

"Of course I say it in strict——"

"Yes, but still—I should say the same to Norburn."

They walked on a few steps, and the Premier had just taken his cigar from his mouth in order to resume the conversation, when a man stepped up to him, appearing, as it seemed, from among the trees, and said,

"May I have a word with you, Mr. Medland?"

The speaker was dressed smartly, but not well,

in a new suit of light clothes. He was tall and strongly built ; a full grey beard made it a matter of difficulty to distinguish his features clearly in the dim light.

“I beg pardon, I don’t think I’ve the pleasure of knowing you, but I shall be very happy. What is it, sir?”

“A word in private,” said the stranger, “if this gentleman will excuse me.”

In response to a glance from his chief, Coxon said good-night and strolled on, hearing Medland say,

“I seem to know your voice, but I can’t lay my hand on your name.”

The stranger drew nearer to him.

“I pass by the name of Benham now,” he said ; “I haven’t forgotten you. I’ve too good cause to remember you.”

Medland looked at him closely.

"It's only the beard that puzzles you," said the stranger, with a grim smile.

"Benyon!" exclaimed the Premier. "I thought you had left the country. What do you want with me, sir?"

"I have not left the country, and I want a good deal with you, Mr. Premier Medland."

"I lost touch of you four years ago."

"Yes; it ceased to matter what became of me about then, didn't it?"

"Have you been in the same place?"

"No; I broke. I have been up country."

"What brings you here? If you wanted money you could have written."

"I've never asked you for money. I wouldn't come to you if I wasn't hard put to it."

"What do you want then?"

"Is that all you have to say to me? Have you no regret to express to me?"

"Not an atom," said the Premier, puffing at his cigar. "If I'd felt any regret I should have expressed it long ago."

"Time doesn't seem to bring repentance to you."

"Don't talk nonsense. What do you want with me?"

"Well, yes, business is business. Look here! I am a respected man where I live. My name is known at Shepherdstown. Benham is, I say, a respected name."

"Well?"

"Now, here in Kirton I'm not known. I was never here in my life before. No one would recognise me as the man whose——"

"As Benyon? I suppose not. Well?"

"Taking all that into account, I see no reason why I shouldn't get the vacant Inspectorship of Railways. It's a nice place, and it's in your gift."

Mr. Medland raised his eyebrows and smiled.



"It involves travelling most of the time," pursued Benham, "and I needn't live in Kirton, if you preferred that arrangement."

"You are very considerate."

"You see you owe me something."

"Which I might pay out of the public purse? Is that your suggestion?"

"Oh, come, we're men of business. You're not on a platform."

"No," said Mr. Medland meditatively. "I am not on a platform. Consequently I feel at liberty to tell you—" he paused and smiled again.

"Well?"

"To go to the devil!" said the Premier.

"Take care! I know a good deal about you. There are many men would be glad to know, definitely, what I know."

"Then ask them for an Inspectorship."

Benham drew a step nearer.

"Ay, and I can hit you nearer home."

"You might have, once. What can you do now? She's safe from you," answered Medland, with a frown.

"Yes, she's safe, but there's the daughter."

"Daisy!"

"Yes, Daisy." And he added, in slow, emphatic tones—"Yes, my daughter Daisy."

Medland was about to answer violently, but he curbed his temper and said quietly,

"Your daughter? Come, don't talk nonsense."

"A daughter born to my wife in wedlock is my daughter. If I claim her, what answer is there?"

"I can prove that she's not your daughter."

"Perhaps; and what an edifying sight! The Premier proving——" Mr. Benham broke off with a laugh that sounded loud and harsh in the silent night air.

Medland ground his heel into the gravel.

"How it will please your Methodist friends, and the swells at Government House! You can tell 'em all about that trip to Meadow Beach under the name of—what was it?—Christie, wasn't it? And about your night-flitting, and——"

"Hold your tongue."

"Oh, there's no one to hear now. You won't like proving all that, will you? No, no, the girl will come to her loving father! Take a minute to think it over, Medland—take just a minute. An Inspectorship's no great matter to a politician, you know. You're not so mighty pure as all that! Take a minute. I can wait," and he flung himself on to a bench and lit a cheroot.

Then, in Digby Square, at two o'clock in the morning, the devil tempted "Jimmy" Medland. The man had indeed hit him close—very close. He had hit him in the love he bore his daughter, and in the love he bore her mother and her mother's

fame. He had hit him in his love of place and power, and his nobler joy in using them for what seemed to him good purposes. Love and tenderness—pride and ambition—the man shot his arrow at all. And as Medland stood motionless in thought, across these abiding reflections came now and again a new one—the image of a face that had been that night upturned to his almost in worship, and would, if this thing were done, be turned away in sorrow, shame, and scorn.

What, after all, was an Inspectorship? It was only doing what the world said all politicians did. What, compared with losing love and power and fair fame, was it to—job an Inspectorship? Besides, from one point of view, the man had a kind of claim upon him: he had done him wrong.

“I dare say,” interrupted Benham, “that you’re thinking there’s nothing to prevent me ‘asking for more’ next month. Well, of course there isn’t.

But I shan't. I only want a decent position and a decent income, and then I'll let you alone. Come, Medland, rancour apart, you know I'm not a common blackmailer."

This remark tickled Medland, and he smiled. Still, it was true in its way. He had known the man very well, and, harsh though he was to all about him, the man had been fairly honest and had borne a decent name. Probably what he was doing now did not seem to him much worse than any other backstairs method of getting on in the world. Medland thought that in all likelihood, if he gained his request, he would keep his word. That thought made the temptation stronger, but it forced itself on him when he remembered the number of years during which he had been even more vulnerable in one respect than he was now, and yet the man had left him alone. He could say neither yes nor no.

"You must give me a few days for consideration," he said.

Benham shrugged his shoulders in amazement.

"Have you promised the berth?" he asked.

"No, I haven't promised it."

"Got another candidate?"

"Only the man who ought to have it," answered the Premier, and Benham's air so infected him that he felt the answer to be a very weak one.

"You see," objected Benham, "from what I can learn you're only in office from day to day, so to speak, and where shall I be if you get turned out?"

"We're safe anyhow till the Assembly meets, ten days hence."

"All right. I'll give you till then. And really, Jimmy Medland, little reason as I have to love you, I should advise you not to be a fool. Here's my address. You can write."

"I shan't write. I may send or come."

Benham laughed.

"He's got some wits about him, after all ! Good-night. Mind giving me a fair start ? You used to be a hot-tempered fellow and—however, I suppose Premiers can't afford the luxury of assaults."

"I'm sorry to say they can't," said Mr. Medland.  
"I'll wait five minutes where I am."

"All right. Good-night," and Mr. Benham disappeared among the trees.

At the end of five minutes the Premier resumed his interrupted walk and soon reached his home. His study showed signs of his daughter's presence. Her fan was on the table, her gloves beside it ; on the mantelpiece lay a red rose, its stalk bound round with wire. Medland recognised it as like the bud Dick Derosne had worn in his button-hole.

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“The young rascal!” he said, as he mixed himself some brandy-and-water, and sat down to his desk. The table was covered with drafts of his new bill, and he pulled the papers into shape, arranged his blotting-pad, and dipped his pen in the ink. Then he lit his pipe and rested his head on the back of his chair, staring up at the ceiling. And there he stayed till the servant, coming in at six o’clock, found him hastily snatching up the pen and seeming to make a memorandum. Being Premier, she said, was killing him, and, “for my part,” she added, “I don’t care how soon we’re out.”



## CHAPTER VII.

### A COMMON SPECTACLE.

AFTER some anxious consideration, Eleanor Scaife decided to keep silence for the present about Mrs. Puttock's strange remark. That lady had deluged her with such a flood of gossip, that Eleanor felt that a thing was not likely to be true merely because Mrs. Puttock asserted it, while, if the suggested scandal had a basis in fact, it was probable that some of the men of the Governor's household, or indeed the Governor himself, would be well informed on the matter. If so, Lord Eynesford would use his discretion in telling his

wife. Eleanor was afraid that, if she interfered, she might run the risk of appearing officious, and of receiving the polite snub which Lady Eynesford was somewhat of an adept in administering. After all, the woman, whoever she was, was dead and gone, and Eleanor, in the absence of fuller knowledge, declined to be shocked. A woman, she reflected, who studies the problems of society, must be prepared for everything. Still, she felt that intimacy with the Medlands was not to be encouraged, and began to range herself by Lady Eynesford's side so far as the Premier was concerned.

"We had a delightful trip," said Lady Eynesford, on the afternoon of the day following the dance. "I hope everything has been going on well here, Eleanor. What was it like at Sir John's?"

"They missed you and the Governor very much."

"Oh, I don't matter, and I hope Dick represented Willie, and danced with everybody's wife in turn. That's poor Willie's duty."

This programme was so very different from that which Dick had planned and carried out on his own account, that Eleanor shrank from the deceit involved in acquiescence.

"I'm afraid not," she said. "You see, Dick's young and hasn't got a wife of his own."

"*Tant mieux*, he'd feel the contrast less," replied Lady Eynesford, with airy assurance. "Who did he dance with?"

Eleanor racked her memory and produced the names of four ladies with each of whom Dick had danced one hasty waltz.

"That's only four dances," objected Lady Eynesford.

"Oh, I didn't notice. I was talking to Sir John and to Mrs. Puttock."

"Eleanor!"

"Well then, he danced once or twice with little Daisy Medland. It was her first ball, you know."

"He needn't have done it twice; I suppose he was bound to once. Dear me! We shall have to consider what we're to do about her now."

"She's a pretty girl, Mary."

"Did Dick think so?" asked Lady Eynesford quickly.

Eleanor distinguished between Mrs. Puttock's remark and Dick's conduct. "Well, it looked like it," she answered.

"What do you mean?"

"To tell the truth, Mary, he danced with her half the evening, and, I think, would have gone on all night if Lady Perry hadn't stopped it."

"The wretched boy!"

At this moment the wretched boy happened to enter Lady Eynesford's boudoir. Dick was dressed

for riding, was humming a tune, and appeared generally well pleased with himself and the world.

"You wretched boy!" said his sister-in-law.

Dick gave her one glance. Then, assuming an air of trepidation, he murmured reproachfully,

*"Nous sommes trahis."*

"What have you to say for yourself? No, I'm not joking. I particularly wanted to avoid being mixed up with these Medlands one bit more than we could help, and, directly my back is turned, you go and——"

"Have you seen Alicia yet?" asked Dick.

"Seen Alicia? No, not to talk to."

"Well then, keep some of it. Don't spend it all on me. You'll want it, Mary."

"Dick, you're very impertinent. What do you mean?"

Dick was about to answer, when he saw

Eleanor frowning at him. He raised his brows. Eleanor rapidly returned the signal.

"She flirted disgracefully with Sir John," he said.

"How dare you make fun of me like that? It was most foolish and—and wrong of you. I shall speak to Willie about it."

"I thought it was the constitutional thing to do," pleaded Dick, but Lady Eynesford was already on her way to the door, and vanished through it with a scornful toss of her head.

"You gave me away," said Dick to Eleanor. "Never trust a woman! And, Eleanor, what were you nodding like an old mandarin for?"

"I thought it just as well we shouldn't vex Mary just now by telling her how—how friendly Alicia was with Mr. Medland."

"Oh, I see. I wish you'd thought it just as well not to vex Mary by telling her how—how friendly I was with Miss Medland."

"It's quite different," said Miss Scaife coldly. "In Alicia, it was merely strange. Mr. Medland might be her father. Now, Miss Medland——"

"I never let on about you and Coxon," said Dick, who wished to change the subject, and made his escape under shelter of Miss Scaife's indignant repudiation.

Still humming his tune, he mounted his horse and rode to the Public Park. At a particular turn of the avenue he pulled up and waited under a tree. Presently a pony-carriage appeared in the distance.

"Good!" said Dick, throwing away his cigarette and feeling if his neck-cloth were in its place. The pony-cart drew near. Dick saw with pleasure the figure of the driver, but he also perceived, to his great disgust, that a man was sitting by her side.

"That's the way they"—he meant women—"let you in!" he remarked. "Anybody would

have supposed she meant she drove alone. Who the deuce has she got there?"

Miss Medland had Norburn with her, and Norburn was just explaining to her—for he did not imitate her father's forbearance—the methods by which he proposed to banish the evil monster, competition, from the world. There is, however, one sort of competition, at least, which Norburn's methods will hardly banish, and it was into the clutches of this particular form of the evil monster that Mr. Norburn was, little as he thought it, about to be pushed. A long period of intimacy and favour excluded from his mind the suspicion that he might have to fight for his position with Daisy Medland; and, if he could have brought himself to entertain the thought of a successful rival—of some one who, coming suddenly between, should break the strong bonds of affection well tried by time—he certainly would not have expected to find such



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a competitor in Dick Derosne. In fact, neither of the young men was capable of appreciating the attractions of the other: Dick considering Norburn very doubtfully a gentleman, and very certainly what in his University days he dubbed a "smug"; Norburn regarding him with the rather impatient contempt that such a man is apt to bestow on those for whom dressing themselves and amusing themselves are the chief labours of a day. Moreover, Norburn did not frequent dances, and young men who do not frequent dances often go wrong by forgetting how much may happen between the afternoon of a Tuesday and the morning of a Wednesday.

No doubt those of us who are men, having been more or less pretty fellows in our time, have had our triumphs, concerning which we are, as a rule, becomingly mute, but occasionally, in the confidences of the smoking-room, undesirably loquacious. For

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this fault there is no excuse, unless such a one as justifies the practice of inflicting reprisals in international quarrels ; it being quite certain that our failures are no secret—indeed there must be covertly (but extensively) circulating somewhere a *Gazette* wherein such occurrences are registered—there is a kind of “ wild justice ” even in smoking-room disclosures. But whatever our bad or good fortune may have been, it is not to be supposed for a moment that any of us enjoy such an enchanting revelation as comes to a young girl who, by nature’s kind freak, has been made beautiful. Daisy Medland was radiant as she turned from Norburn’s pale thoughtful face and careless garb to Dick Derosne, the outward perfection of a well-born, well-made, well-dressed Englishman, bowing, smiling, and debonair. Daisy liked Norburn very much—how much she never quite knew—but there was no doubt that two young men were a

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pleasant change from one, and the contrast between them increased the charm—a novel charm to her—of the situation, for she was well aware that, different as they were from one another, strong as the contrast was, they were both at this moment thinking precisely the same thought, namely, “Who’s this fellow, and what does he want?”—a coincidence which again shows that Norburn’s theories had much to do before they conquered the world.

It is not a very uncommon sight to see a clever man sit mum, abashed by the chatter of a cheery shallow-pate, who is happily unconscious of the oppressive triviality of his own conversation. Norburn’s eager flow of words froze at the contact of Dick’s small-talk, and he was a discontented auditor of ball-room and club gossip. It amazed him that a man should know, or care, or talk about more than half the things on which Dick descanted

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so merrily ; it astounded him that they should win interest as keen and looks as bright as had ever rewarded the deepest truth or the highest aspiration. All of which, however, was not really at all odd, if only Mr. Norburn would have considered the matter a little more closely. But then an old favourite threatened by a new rival is not in a mood for cool analysis.

“And they say,” pursued Dick, “that Puttock’s coming back to your father because Sir Robert trod on Mrs. P.’s new black silk and tore it half off her—tore it awfully, you know.”

Daisy laughed gaily.

“You weren’t there, were you, Mr. Norburn ? Well, it was worth all the money only to see old Mrs. Grim eat ices—you remember, Miss Medland ? She bolted three while Sir John was proposing the Queen’s health, and two more in the first verse of ‘God save—’” and so Dick ran on.

Mr. Norburn consulted his watch.

"I'm afraid I must go," he said. "I'm due at the office."

"Oh," exclaimed Daisy penitently, "I forgot. But can't I drive you back?"

"I couldn't trouble you to do that. You're not going back so soon?"

"But of course I can, Mr. Norburn; it's so far to walk."

"I don't mind the walk."

"Are you really quite sure? It is a beautiful morning to be out, isn't it?"

Norburn took his leave, thinking, no doubt, of his official duties and nothing else, and Daisy touched her pony.

"I must go on," she said.

"So must I," said Dick, "mustn't keep my horse standing any longer."

"Why not? He can't catch cold to-day."

“ Oh, he'd take root and never go away—just as I do, when I stand near you, you know.”

It is not proposed to set out the rest of their conversation. Daisy forgot Norburn's gloomy face, Dick forgot every face but Daisy's, and the usual things were said and done. An appeal to the memory of any reader will probably give a result accurate enough. Imagine yourself on a pretty morning, in a pretty place, by a pretty girl, and let her be kind and you not a numskull, and there's half-a-dozen pages saved.

It was, however, a little unfortunate that, at the last moment, when the third good-bye was being said, Lady Eynesford should come whirling by in her barouche.

“ The deuce ! ” said Dick under his breath.

Lady Eynesford's features did not relax. She bowed to her brother-in-law gravely and stiffly ; her gaze appeared to travel far over the top of the

low pony-carriage which contained Daisy Medland. Dick flushed with vexation. True, the Governor's wife did not yet know the Premier's daughter, but she need not have insisted on the fact so ostentatiously. Dick turned to his companion. She was laughing.

"Why are you laughing?" he asked, rather offended. A man seldom likes to be thought to value the opinion of the women of his family, valuable as it always is.

"You know very well," she answered. "Oh, I dare say I've got into trouble too."

"I don't care," said Dick valiantly.

"Neither do I—at least, not much."

"I don't see how you can have got into trouble."

"Ah, perhaps you don't see everything, Mr. Derosne."

"I say, you don't mean that Mr.—?"

"Good-bye," said Daisy, whipping up her pony.

Dick was left wondering what she had meant, and whether anything so preposterous and revolting as the idea of Norburn having any business to control her doings or her likings could possibly have any truth in it. And, as a natural result of this disturbing notion, he determined to see her again as soon as he could.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### FOR THE HIGHEST BIDDER.

SHEPHERDSTOWN, the spot where Mr. Benham said that his was a respected name—and he said quite truly, for he had managed to pay his debts as they fell due, and nothing was known against his character—lay in Puttock's constituency, and Benham thought it well to call upon his representative. The only secret part of his enterprise had been transacted with the Premier in Digby Square : for the rest, a plausible overttness of action was plainly desirable. He obtained an interview with Puttock, and laid before him his hopes and his qualifications. Mr. Puttock was graciousness

itself ; he remembered, with gratitude and surprising alacrity, his visitor's local services to the party ; had he been still in office, it would have been his delight no less than his duty to press Benham's incontestable claims ; he would have felt that he was merely paying a small part of the debt he owed Shepherdstown and one of its leading men, and would, at the same time, have enjoyed the conviction that he was enlisting in the public service a man of tried integrity and ability.

"Unhappily, however," said Mr. Puttock, spreading out his plump hands in pathetic fashion, "as you might conjecture, Mr.—" he glanced at the visitor's card—"Benham, my influence at the present juncture is less than *nil*. I am powerless. I can only look on at what I conceive to be a course of conduct fraught with peril to the true interests of New Lindsey, and entirely inconsistent with the best traditions of our party."

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“Your views are heartily shared at home,” responded Benham. “Speaking in confidence, I can assure you of that, sir. Our confidence in the Ministry ended when you retired.”

“As long as my constituents approve of my action, I am content. But I am grieved not to be able to help you.”

“But, in spite of present differences, surely your good word would carry weight. My name is, I believe, already before the Premier, and if it was backed by your support——”

“Let me recommend you,” said Puttock sourly, “to try to obtain Mr. Norburn’s good word. That is, between ourselves, all-powerful.”

Benham frowned.

“Norburn! Much Norburn would do for me.”

“Why, does he know you?” asked Puttock.  
“Have you any quarrel with him?”

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"There's no love lost between us. He organised my shearers when they struck two years ago."

"What are you?"

"Sheep, sir. The fellow came down and fought me, and—well, sir, he said things about me that you'd hardly credit."

"Oh, I hope," said Puttock earnestly, "that that would not influence his judgment. But, to be frank—well, it's common knowledge that Mr. Norburn and I found we could not work together."

"But surely, sir, the Premier will take his own line?"

"I don't know. As likely as not, Norburn will have some Labour man to press."

"Ah, if we could see you at the head of the Government!"

"I don't deny that I am deeply disappointed with the Premier's course of action—so deeply that I can give him no support."

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Mr. Benham remained silent for a minute, meditating. He perceived that, in case Medland proved unreasonable, a second string lay ready to his hand. He wondered how much Puttock already knew—and what he would pay for more knowledge. The worst of it was that Puttock had the reputation of being an uncommonly good hand at a bargain.

“Yet Mr. Medland’s a very clever man,” he observed.

“Oh, clever, yes ; but I fear unstable, Mr. Benham.”

“I suppose so. After all a man’s private life is some guide, isn’t it?”

“Some guide!” exclaimed Puttock. “Surely you understate the case. If a man’s private life is discreditable——”

“But would you go so far as that about the Premier?” inquired Benham, with a pained air.

“There’s no smoke without fire, I’m afraid. It’s

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a painful subject, and of course only a matter of rumour, but——”

“You see, I’ve been living in the country, and I’m not up in all that’s said here.”

“I wouldn’t mention it to everybody, but to you I may venture. According to the report among those in a position to know, there was the gravest doubt as to the regularity of—his domestic relations.”

“Dear, dear!”

“Nothing, as I say, is known or could, probably, be proved. It would damage him most seriously of course, if that sort of thing were proved.”

“I should think so indeed. He could hardly remain where he is.”

“I don’t know. Well, perhaps not. A little while ago I should have deeply regretted anything calculated to lessen his influence, but now—well, well, we shall see.”

“Your secession has so weakened him that he

couldn't stand up against it," said Benham, with conviction. "And then—why, we might have a real leader."

Mr. Benham's admiring gaze left no doubt as to the heaven-sent leader who was in his mind, and he had the satisfaction of detecting a gleam of eagerness in Mr. Puttock's eye.

"He may be of use to me, if Medland kicks," reflected Benham as he walked away. But he hoped that the Premier would not prove recalcitrant. He had counted on the sufficiency of threats, and it would be an annoyance if he were forced to resort to action; for he could not deny that his respected name would suffer some stain in the process of inflicting punishment, if the victim chose to declare the terms on which the chastisement might have been averted.

Now this aspect of the case had presented itself to Medland also, reinforcing the considerations

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which weighed against giving Benham the appointment he sought. The Premier hated yielding, and he hated jobs : Benham asked him to acknowledge himself beaten, and, as ransom, to perpetrate a peculiarly dirty job. At most times of his life he would not even have looked at such a proposal, but his new-won position, with its possibilities and its risks, made him timid : he was fearful as a child of anything that would jeopardise what he had so hardly and narrowly achieved ; and this unwonted mood increased his dread of Benham's disclosures to an almost superstitious terror. Under the influence of this feeling, he was so far false to his standard of conduct as tentatively to mention Benham's name to Norburn as that of a possible candidate for the vacant post. He expected to hear in reply nothing more than a surprised inquiry as to the man's claims, but Norburn, despite his faithfulness to every wish of his



leader's, besought him earnestly to make no such choice.

"You don't know about him," he said ; "but in his own neighbourhood he's known far and wide as a hard employer and a determined enemy of the Unions. Such an appointment would do us immense harm."

"I didn't know that. You're sure?"

"I believe it might cost us a dozen votes. I couldn't defend the choice myself. I fought him once, and I know all about him. Who recommended him to you?"

"No one. He came himself."

Norburn laughed.

"It needs some assurance," he remarked, "for a man with his record to come to you. He must have known that I could tell you all about him."

The Premier smiled: to tell him all about

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Benham was exactly what his zealous young colleague could not do.

"Then it's quite out of the question?" he asked.

"If you take my opinion, quite."

The Premier gave a sigh of relief. He was glad to have the matter settled for him, and to be saved from the temptation that had been besetting him these ten days past.

"The fellow must be mad to expect such a thing," continued Norburn. "Why doesn't he go to the other side?"

"Perhaps he will now," answered Medland. It seemed not at all unlikely.

When his mind was finally made up, Medland found at first a reckless pleasure in, as he expressed it to himself, "chancing it." He had always been fond of a fight against odds. The odds were against him here, and the stakes perilously high. His spirits rose; his mouth was set firm, and his

eyes gleamed as they had gleamed when the crowd led him in triumph to his house three weeks ago. The battle was to begin to-morrow ; the House met then, and all his foes, public and private, would close round him and his band of friends. And, when the fresh attack had been delivered, how many would his friends be ? Rousing himself, he got up.

“ You stay with Daisy,” he said to Norburn. “ I must go out for an hour.”

It was nine o'clock, and he made his way swiftly to the address which Benham had given him. He found that gentleman in a quiet and respectable lodging, and was received with civility.

“ You are just to your time,” said Benham.

“ I'm not behind it. I had till to-morrow.”

“ And you have brought the appointment ? ”

“ No.”

“ The promise of it, then ? ”

"No ; I can't do it."

"Why not ?"

"Well, I don't know why I should tell you, but for two good reasons—it's difficult and it's dirty. Difficult because you're not popular with my friends—dirty, because—but you know that."

"You really mean to refuse?"

"Yes."

"Then what are you going to do for me?"

"I can't do anything for you."

"That's final?" asked Benham, facing him squarely. "You utterly refuse to do me a small favour, though you were ready enough to ruin my life?"

Medland was doubtful if he had ruined the man's life, but he only answered—

"I can't job you into anything. That's what you want, and it's what I can't do for you."

"Very well. I've got a thing of value, haven't

I? Well, I shall sell it to the highest bidder. Ay, and I tell you what, James Medland, I'll be level with you before I die, God help me I will! You shall be sorry for this, before I've done with you."

"I take the chance of that. If you're in want, I'll supply you with money, as far as my means allow."

"Your means? What are they? You won't have your salary long, if I can help it. I think I can find a better market, thank you."

Medland turned on his heel. He had come with a vague idea of trying in some way to smooth over matters between them. It was plainly impossible; he had no wish to bribe, and, if he had, clearly he could not bribe high enough. He was still in his confident mood, and Benham's rude threats roused him to defiance.

"Have it your own way," he said; "but people

who attack me in Kirton run some risks," and he went out with a smile on his face.

As he strolled home again, his exultant temper left him. The springiness of his step relaxed into a slouching gait, and his head fell forward. He stopped and turned half round, as though to go back ; then, with a sigh, he held on his way. Far off, he could see the twinkling lights of ships, and, in the still of evening, catch the roll of the sea as it broke on the beach, and an odd fancy came over him of sailing far away with his daughter over the sea—or, perhaps better still, of walking quietly into the water until it closed over his head. Now and then he grew tired of fighting, and to him life was all fighting now.

"Meditating new resolutions, Medland?" asked a cheery voice at his side.

Turning with a start, he saw the Chief Justice, who continued,

"You'll be in the thick of it to-morrow, I suppose?"

"I have left off thinking where I shall be to-morrow," he answered. "To-day is enough for a Minister."

"And to-morrow may be too much? Young Heseltine offered just now to lay me six to five you'd be out in a month."

"Confound him! Who is he?"

"One of the Governor's young fellows."

"Oh, yes, I remember."

"Talking of that, I had some very kind inquiries about you at Government House to-day."

"Ah!"

"From Miss Derosne. She's a warm admirer of yours, and really a most charming girl. Well, good-night. I shall try and get down to hear your statement to-morrow."

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Sir John bustled off, leaving the Premier with a new bent of thought. In his mind he rehearsed his interview with Alicia Derosne, wondering, as men wonder after they have been carried away by emotion into unrestrained disclosures of their hearts, whether she had really been impressed; whether, after all, he had not been, or seemed, insincere, theatrical, or absurd; wondering again in what light she would look on him, when she knew what it looked likely all Kirton would know soon; wondering last whether, if he had not met the woman who had been his partner in life for so long, and had, in youth, met such a girl as Alicia Derosne, his fate would have been different, and he need not now have trembled at his story being told. Immersed in thought he wandered on, out of the town and down to the shores of the bay, and checked himself, with a sudden laugh, only on the very brink of the sea. The absurdity struck



him; he laughed again, as he lit a cigar and rebuked himself aloud.

“ Here I am, a Premier and forty-one ! and I’m going on for all the world like a cross between a love-sick boy and a runaway criminal ! ”

He paused and added,

“ And the worst of it, I am rather like a criminal and——”

He paused abruptly. A thought struck him and made him frown angrily at his folly. It was stupid to think of himself as love-sick, even in jest. He had not come to that. And to think of himself as a lover was not a thought that carried pleasant memories to Mr. Medland.

## CHAPTER IX.

### TWO HASTY UTTERANCES.

"THANK God, there's the Legislative Council, anyhow!" exclaimed Mr. Kilshaw.

Sir Robert Perry pursed up his lips. He had fought with that safeguard of stability behind him once or twice before, and the end had been defeat. There were better things than the support of the Legislative Council.

"I'd rather," he remarked, "have a dissolution and a thumping campaign fund. If I'd known they were at sixes and sevens like this, I'd have taken the Governor's offer."

"Hum," said Mr. Kilshaw, who would be expected to subscribe largely to the suggested fund. "But how do you propose to get your dissolution now? Besides, I believe he'd beat us."

"That would depend on Puttock—and one or two more."

"What did you think of Puttock's explanation?"

"The whole performance reminded me of a highly religious rattlesnake: it was a magnificent struggle against natural venom."

"I thought it very creditable."

"Oh, I suppose so: it would be, if you think of it, in the snake. But Medland will be replying soon. Come along."

They hurried into the House, and found the Premier already on his legs. The floor and the galleries were crowded, and the space allotted to ladies—there was no grating in New Lindsey, as Eleanor Scaife had already recorded in her

note-book—was bright with gay colours. Sir Robert and Mr. Kilshaw slipped into their places just in time to see Medland stoop down to Norburn, who sat next him, and whisper to him. Norburn nodded with a defiant air, and Medland, with a slight frown, proceeded. The Premier had no easy task. Puttock had fallen on his flank with skill and effect, and Norburn, who followed, had increased his leader's difficulties by a brilliant but indiscreet series of tilts against every section except that to which he himself belonged; Jewell had answered powerfully, and Coxon had coughed and fidgeted. The Premier was now skilfully paring away what his lieutenant had said, and justifying every proposition he advanced by a reference to Mr. Puttock's previous speeches. Mr. Puttock, in his turn, fidgeted, and Coxon smiled sardonically. The Premier, encouraged by this success, pulled himself together and approached the last and most

delicate part of his task, which was to defend or palliate a phrase of Norburn's that had been greeted with angry groans and protests. Mr. Norburn had in fact referred to the Capitalist class as a "parasitic growth," and Medland was left to get out of this indiscretion as best he could. He referred to the unhappy phrase. The storm which had greeted its first appearance broke out again. There were cries of "Withdraw!" Mr. Kilshaw called out, "Do you adopt that? Yes or no;" Norburn's followers cheered; redoubled groans answered them; Eleanor made notes, and Alicia's eyes were fixed on Medland, who stood silent and smiling.

Kilshaw cried again, "Do you adopt it?"

Medland turned towards him, and in slow and measured tones began to describe a visit he had paid to Kilshaw's mill. He named no name, but everybody knew to whose works he referred.

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“There was a man there,” he said, “working with a fever upon him ; there was a woman working—and by her, her baby, five days old ; there were old men who looked to no rest but the grave, and children who were always too tired to play ; there were girls without innocence, boys without merriment, women without joy, men without hope. And, as I walked home in the evening, back to my house, I met a string of race-horses ; they were in training, I was told, for the Kirton Cup ; their owner spent, they said, ten thousand pounds a year on his stables. Their owner, Sir, owned the mill—and them that worked there.”

He paused, and then, with a gesture unusual in that place, he laid his hand on Norburn's shoulder, and went on in a tone of gentle apology :

“What wonder if men with hot hearts and young heads use hard words ? What wonder if they confound the bad with the good ? Yes, what

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wonder if, once again, good and bad shall fall in a common doom?"

He sat down suddenly, still keeping his hand on his young colleague's shoulder, and Sir Robert rose and prayed leave to say a few words in reference to the—he seemed to pause for a word—the remarkable utterance which had fallen from the Premier. Sir Robert's rapier flashed to and fro, now in grave indignation, now in satirical jest, and, at the end, he rose almost to eloquence in bidding the Premier remember the responsibility such words, spoken by such a man, carried with them.

"You may say," said Sir Robert, "that to prophesy revolution is not to justify it—that to excuse violence is not to advocate it. Ignorant men reckon little of wire-drawn distinctions, and I am glad, Sir—I say, I am glad that not on my head rests the weight of such wild words and open threats as we have heard to-day. For my head is grey,

and I must soon give an account of what I have done."

The debate ended, leaving the general impression that the Government stood committed to a policy which some called thorough and some dangerous. Mr. Kilshaw, passing Puttock in the lobby, remarked,

"You'll have some fine opportunities for your 'independent and discriminating support,' Puttock, and I hope your banking account will be the fatter for it."

Puttock made a slight grimace, and Kilshaw smiled complacently. He had great hopes of Puttock, and was pleased when the latter remarked,

"By the way, Kilshaw, here's a friend of mine who's anxious to know you," and he introduced his influential constituent, Mr. Benham of Shepherds-town. The three men stood talking together and



saw Medland pass by. Kilshaw, assuming Benham loved the Premier no more than Mr. Puttock, remarked,

“I’d give something handsome to see that fellow smashed.”

“Would you?” asked Benham, with an eager smile; Kilshaw promised him a better opening than Puttock. He stepped across to Medland, raising his hat.

“A moment, Mr. Medland. You have not changed your mind on that little matter?”

“The appointment was made this morning,” replied Medland, somewhat surprised to see him in the lobby.

“I am here with Mr. Puttock,” said Benham, answering his look, “and Mr. Kilshaw.”

Medland smiled.

“The appointment is made all the same,” he remarked.

Benham bowed and returned to his friends. The Premier, seeing Eleanor and Alicia in front of him, overtook and joined them.

"Are you walking home?" he asked.

"Mr. Coxon is escorting us," answered Eleanor, indicating that gentleman, who was walking with them.

Perhaps Mr. Coxon in his day-dreams looked forward to the time when he should fight the Premier for his place and defeat him. He did not expect to have to fight with him for a position by a girl's side. Nevertheless he found, to his chagrin, that Medland did not pair off with Eleanor Scaife, but continued to walk by and talk to Alicia. Being a man of much assurance, he hazarded a protesting glance at Alicia: she met it with an impossible intensity of unconsciousness, and Eleanor maliciously opened fire upon him out of the batteries with which Tomes supplied her, at the same

time quickening her pace and compelling him to leave the others behind.

Alicia glanced up at Medland.

"I thought of what you said the other night all the time," she began ; "but you did not say it so well to-day."

"Ah, you remember the other night?"

"You were bold and straightforward then. I thought—I thought you fenced with it a little to-day."

"I'm not used to be charged with that."

"I suppose it was only by comparison."

"Yes. And nobody but you could make the comparison."

"I shall always like best to remember you by what you said then."

"Ah, I had to please so many people to-day. The other night I didn't think of pleasing any one—not even you! But I hope it's not coming to

‘remembering’ me yet. You’re not going to leave us?”

“We’re only birds of passage, you know. My brother’s term will be up in fifteen months now.”

“Well, Miss Derosne, I’m afraid fifteen months are likely enough to see an end of most of the dreams I talked about to you.”

“No, no,” she exclaimed eagerly. Then checking herself she added, “But what right have I to talk to you about it?”

“I talked to you.”

“Oh, I happened to be there.”

“Yes, and so I happened to talk. That’s the way when people get on together.”

Alicia looked up with a smile. Short as her acquaintance had been, she felt that the Premier was no longer a stranger. By opening his mind to her as he had done, he had claimed nothing less than friendship. He was, she told herself, like an

old friend. And yet he was also unlike one ; for, in intercourse with old friends, people are not subject alternately to impulses towards unrestrained intimacy and reactions to shy reserve. She liked him, but she was afraid of him ; in fine, she was hardly happy with him, and not happy— The confession could not be finished even to herself.

“ Shall you be glad to go home, or sorry ? ” he asked.

“ Oh, I shall be very sorry.”

“ Then,” he suggested, smiling, “ why not stay ? ”

The question came pat in tune with those thoughts that would not be suppressed. Before she knew what she was doing—before she had time to reflect that probably his words were merely an idle civility or the playful suggestion of an impossibility, she exclaimed,

“ What do you—— ? ”

She stopped suddenly, in horror at herself ; for

she found him looking at her with surprise, and she felt her face flooded with colour.

“I beg your pardon?” said Medland.

Full of anger and shame, she could not answer him. Without a shadow of excuse—she could not find a shadow of excuse—she had read into his words a meaning he never thought of. She could not now conceive how she had done it. If told the like about another, she knew how scornfully severe her judgment would have been. He had surprised her, caught her unawares, and wrung from her an open expression of a wild idea that she had refused to recognise even in her own heart. She felt that her cheeks were red. Would the glow that burnt her never go?—and she bit her lips, for she was near tears. Oh, that he might not have seen! Or had she committed the sin unpardonable to a girl such as she was? Had she betrayed herself unasked?

“Nothing,” she stammered at last. “Nothing.” But she felt the heat still in her cheeks. She would have given the world to be able to tell him not to look at her ; but she knew his puzzled eyes still sought hers, in hope of light.

He might at least say something ! Silently he walked by her side along the road to Government House—that endless, endless road. She could not speak—and he—she only knew that he did not. She felt, by a subtle perception, his glance turned on her now and again, but he did not break the silence. The strain was too much ; in spite of all her efforts, in spite of a hatred of her own weakness that would have made her, for the moment, sooner die, a hysterical sob burst from her lips.

Medland stopped.

“You must let me go,” he said. “I am very busy. You can overtake the others. Good-bye.”

He held out his hand; and she gave him hers.

It was kind of him to go and make no words about the manner of his going, yet it showed that her desperate hope that he had not noticed was utterly vain.

"Good-bye," she managed to murmur, with averted head.

"I shall see you again soon," he said, pressing her hand, and was gone.

In the evening, Lady Eynesford trenchantly condemned the ventilation of the Houses of Parliament.

"The wretched place has given Alicia a headache. I found the poor child crying with pain. I wonder you let her stay, Eleanor."

"I didn't notice that it was close or hot."

"My dear Eleanor, you're as strong as a pony," remarked Lady Eynesford. "A very little thing upsets Alicia."



## CHAPTER X.

### THE SMOKE OF HIDDEN FIRES.

"NO, I don't like turn-down collars," remarked Daisy Medland.

"I'm very sorry," said Norburn. "You never said so before, and they're so comfortable."

"And why don't you wear a high hat, and a frock-coat? It looks so much better. Mr.—well, Mr. Coxon always does when he goes anywhere in the afternoon."

"I didn't know Coxon was your standard of perfection, Daisy. He didn't use to be in the old days."

"Oh, it's not only Mr. Coxon."

"I know it isn't," replied Norburn significantly.

"I wonder the Governor lets you come in that hat," continued Daisy, scornfully eyeing Norburn's unconventional headgear.

"It's very like your father's."

"My father's not a young man. What would you think if the Governor laid foundation-stones in a short jacket and a hat like yours?"

"I should think him a very sensible man."

"Well, I should think him a *guy*," said Miss Medland, with intense emphasis.

This method of treating an old friend galled Norburn excessively. When anger is in, the brains are out.

"I suppose Mr. Derosne is your ideal," he said.

Daisy accepted the opening of hostilities with alacrity.

"He dresses just perfectly," she remarked, "and he doesn't bore one with politics."

This latter remark was rather shameless, for Daisy was generally a keen partisan of her father's, and very ready to listen to anything connected with his public doings.

"You never used to say that sort of thing to me."

"Oh, 'used!' I believe you've said 'used' six times in ten minutes! Am I always to go on talking as I *used* when I was in the nursery? I say it now anyhow, Mr. Norburn."

Norburn took up the despised hat. Looking at it now through Daisy's eyes he could not maintain that it was a handsome hat.

"It's your own fault. You began it," said Daisy, stifling a pang of compunction, for she really liked him very much, else why should she mind what he wore?

"I began it?"

"Yes. By—by dragging in Mr. Derosne."

"I only mentioned him as an example of fashionable youth."

"You know you wouldn't like it if I went about in dowdy old things."

"I don't mind a bit what you wear. It's all the same to me."

"How very peculiar you are!" exclaimed Daisy, with a look of compassionate amazement. "Most people notice what I wear. Oh, and I've got a charming dress for the flower-show at Government House."

"You're invited, are you?" asked Norburn, with an ill-judged exhibition of surprise.

"Of course I'm invited."

"I'm sorry to hear it."

"Why, pray, Mr. Norburn? Are you going?"

"Yes. I suppose I must."

"Not in that hat!" implored Daisy.

"Certainly," answered Norburn, though it is doubtful if he had in truth intended to do so, but for Daisy's taunts.

A tragic silence followed. At last, Miss Medland exclaimed,

"What will Lady Eynesford think of my friends?"

"I didn't know you cared so much for what Lady Eynesford thought. Besides, I need not present myself in that character."

"Oh, if you're going to be disagreeable!"

"For my part, I'm sorry you're going at all."

"Thank you. Is that because I shall enjoy it?"

"I don't care for that sort of society."

"I like it above everything."

Matters having thus reached a direct issue, Norburn clapped the *causa belli* on his head, and

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walked out of the room, dimly conscious that he had done himself as much harm as he possibly could in the space of a quarter of an hour. When he grew cool, he confessed that the momentary, if real, pleasure of being unpleasant was somewhat dearly bought at the cost of enmity with Daisy Medland. Indeed this unhappy young man, for all that his whole soul was by way of being absorbed in reconstructing society, would have thought most things a bad bargain at such a price. But his bitterness had been too strong. It seemed as though all his devotion, ay, and—he did not scruple to say to himself—all his real gifts were to weigh as nothing against the cut of a coat and the “sit” of a cravat—for to such elemental constituents his merciless and jealous analysis reduced poor Dick Derosne’s attractions.

Little recked Dick of Norburn’s feelings in the glow of his triumph. He was convinced that he

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alone had persuaded Lady Eynesford into including Daisy in her invitation to luncheon at the opening of the flower-show. It would have been a pity, in the mere interests of truth, to interfere with this conceit of Dick's, and Eleanor forbore to disclose her own share in the matter, or to hint at that long interview between the Governor and his wife.

"We shall live to regret it," said Lady Eynesford, "but it shall be as you wish, Willie."

So the Medlands came with the rest of the world to the flower-show, and were received with due ceremony and regaled with suitable fare. And afterwards the Governor took Daisy for a stroll through the tents, and, having thus done his duty handsomely, handed her over to Dick; but she and Dick found the tents stuffy and crowded, and sat down under the trees and enjoyed themselves very much, until Mr. Puttock espied them and came up to them, accompanied by a friend.

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"I hope you're not very angry with me, Miss Daisy?" said Puttock, thinking she might resent his desertion of the Premier.

"Oh, but I am!" said Daisy, and truly enough, whatever the reason might be.

"Well, you mustn't visit it on my friend here, who is anxious to make your acquaintance. Miss Medland—Mr. Benham."

Benham sat down and began to make himself agreeable. He had a flow of conversation, and seemed in no hurry to move. Captain Heseltine appeared with a summons for Dick, who sulkily obeyed. Puttock caught sight of Jewell, and, with an apology, pursued him. Benham sat talking to Daisy Medland. Presently he proposed they should go where they would see the people better, and Daisy, who was bored, eagerly acquiesced. They took a seat by the side of the broad gravel walk.



"Will no one rescue me?" thought Daisy.

"He's bound to pass soon," thought Benham.

Benham's wish was the first to be fulfilled. Before long the Premier came in sight, accompanied by Coxon.

"Ah, there's your daughter," said the latter. "You were wondering where she was."

Medland looked, and saw Daisy and Benham sitting side by side. He quickened his pace and went up to them. Benham rose and took off his hat. Medland ignored him.

"I was looking for you, Daisy," he said. "I want you."

Daisy stood up, with relief.

"Good-day, Mr. Medland," said Benham. "I have enjoyed making" (he paused, but barely perceptibly) "Miss Medland's acquaintance."

Medland bowed coldly.

"Mr. Puttock was good enough to introduce me."

"I am ready, father," said Daisy. "Good-bye, Mr. Benham."

Benham took her offered hand, and, with a smile, held it for a moment longer than sufficed for an ordinary farewell. Still holding it, he began—

"I hope we shall meet often in the future and—"

Medland, in a sudden fit of anger, seized his daughter's arm and drew it away.

"I do not desire your acquaintance, sir," he said, in loud, harsh tones, "for myself or my daughter."

Benham smiled viciously; Coxon, who stood by, watched the scene closely.

"Ah!" said Benham, "perhaps not; but you know me—and so will she," and he in his turn raised his voice in growing excitement.

Daisy, frightened at the angry interview, clung to Medland's arm, looking in wonder from him

to Benham. Some half-dozen people, seeing the group, stopped for a moment in curiosity and, walking on, cast glances back over their shoulders. A lull in the babble of conversation warned Medland, and he looked round. Alicia Derosne was passing by in company with the Chief Justice. Near at hand stood Kilshaw, watching the encounter with a sneering smile. The Chief Justice stepped up to Medland.

"What's the matter?" he asked, in a low tone.

"Nothing," said Medland. "Only I do not wish my daughter to talk to this gentleman."

The contempt of his look and tone goaded Benham to fury.

"I don't care what you wish," he exclaimed.

"I have as good a right as anybody to talk to the young lady, considering that she's——"

Before he could finish his sentence, Kilshaw darted up to him, and caught him by the arm.

"Not yet, you fool," he whispered, drawing the angry man away.

Benham yielded, and Kilshaw caught Medland's look of surprise.

"Come, Mr. Benham," he said aloud, "you and Mr. Medland must settle your differences, if you have any, elsewhere."

Medland glanced sharply at him, but accepted the cue.

"You are right," he said. "Come, Daisy," and he walked away with his daughter on his arm, while Kilshaw led Benham off in the opposite direction, talking to him urgently in a low voice. Benham shook his head again and again in angry protest, seeming to ask why he had not been allowed his own way.

The group of people passed on, amid inquiries who Benham was, and conjectures as to the cause of the Premier's anger.

"Now what in the world," asked Sir John, fitting his *pince-nez* more securely on his nose, "do you make of that, Miss Derosne?"

Sir John thought that he was addressing an indifferent spectator, and Alicia's manner did not undeceive him.

"How should I know, Sir John? It must have been politics."

"They wouldn't talk politics here—and, if they did, Medland would not quarrel about them."

"Did you hear what he said, Chief Justice?" asked Coxon.

"Yes, I heard."

"Curious, isn't it?"

"It's most tantalisingly curious," said Sir John.

"But, all the same, we mustn't forget the flowers," remarked Alicia, with affected gaiety.

They moved on, and the onlookers, still canvassing the incident, scattered their various ways.

It was Coxon who told Lady Eynesford about it afterwards, and her comment to the Governor that evening at dinner was,

"There, Willie! Didn't I tell you something horrid would come of having those people?"

No one answered her. The Governor knew better than to encourage a discussion. Dick swore softly under his breath at Coxon, and Alicia began to criticise Lady Perry's costume. Lady Eynesford followed up her triumph.

"I hope all you Medlandites are satisfied now," she said.

And Lady Eynesford was not the only person who found some satisfaction in this unfortunate incident, for when Daisy told Norburn about it, he remarked, with an extraordinary want of reason,

"I knew you'd be sorry you went."

"I'm not at all sorry," protested Daisy. "But why was father angry?"

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"I'm sure I don't know. Didn't he tell you?"

"No."

"Oh, I recollect. This Benham has been worrying him about some appointment."

"That doesn't account for his saying that he had as good a right as anybody to talk to me. I don't understand it."

"Well, neither do I. But you would go."

"Really, you're too absurd," said Daisy pettishly.

And poor Norburn knew that he was very absurd, and yet could not help being very absurd, although he despised himself for it.

The real truth was that Daisy had told him that, except for this one occurrence, she had had a most charming afternoon, and that Dick Derosne had been kindness itself.

This was enough to make even a rising statesman angry, and, when angry, absurd.

## CHAPTER XI.

### A CONSCIENTIOUS MAN'S CONSCIENCE. .

A VERY few hours after its occurrence, the scene at the flower-show was regretted by all who took part in it. Medland realised the foolishness of his indiscretion and want of temper; Benham was afraid that he might have set inquiring minds on the track of game which he wished to hunt down for himself; Kilshaw was annoyed at having been forced into such an open display of his relations with and his influence over Benham. Even to himself, his dealings with the man were a delicate subject. Almost every one has one or two matters



which he would rather not discuss with his own conscience ; and his bargain with Benham was one of these tabooed topics to Kilshaw. For, in spite of what he had done in this instance, he belonged to a class which some righteous and superior people will have it does not exist. He was a conscientious politician—a man who, in the main, was honest and straightforward ; prone indeed to think that what he had was necessarily identical with what he ought to have, and that any law not based on a recognition of this fact was an iniquitous law, but loyal to his friends, his class, his party, and his country ; ready to spend and work for his own rights' sake, but no niggard of time or money in larger causes ; sincere in his convictions, dauntless in affirming and upholding them, hardly conceiving that honest men could differ from them ; strong in his self-confidence, believing that the best men always won, suspecting from the

bottom of his heart every appeal to sentiment in the mouth of a politician. Such he was—a type of the man of success, with the hardness that success is apt to bring, but with the virtues that attain it; and his defects and merits had made him, for years past, Sir Robert Perry's most valued lieutenant, and a very pillar of the cautious conservative ideas on which that statesman's influence was based.

And now Mr. Kilshaw, impelled less by mere self-interest than by the rankling of a personal feud, had—dipped the end of his fingers in pitch. He had resented fiercely Medland's hardly disguised attack on him, and it had fanned into flame the wrath which the Premier's schemes, threatening the profits of himself and his fellow-capitalists, and the Premier's principles, redolent to his nostrils of the quackery and hypocrisy that he hated, had set alight in his heart. Against

such a man and such a policy, was not everything fair? Was it not even fair to use a tool like Benham, if the tool put itself in his hand?

Yet he was ashamed; but, being in secret ashamed, he, as men often do, set his face and went on his way all the more obstinately.

He bought Mr. Benham, Mr. Benham and his secret; they were heartily at his disposal, for he could pay a better price than Puttock could; and he laid them by in his arsenal, for use, he carefully added to himself, only in the very last emergency.

"Not yet, you fool!" he had whispered to his tool in anger and alarm. The tool did not know how dirty it seemed to the hand that was to use it, and yet shrank from using it until the very last. But if it came to the very last—why, he would use it; and Mr. Kilshaw inspected the pitch on the end of his fingers, and almost convinced himself that it was not pitch at all.

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Yet was this "very last" very far off? Since the flower-show, the Premier was displaying feverish activity. He was like a man who is stricken by mortal sickness, but has some work that he must finish before the time comes when he can do no more work, and know no more joy in the work he has done. Bill after bill was introduced embodying his schemes, and the popular praise of him and enthusiasm rose higher and higher at the sight of a minister doing, or at least attempting, all and more than he promised. The Ministry was worked to death; the Governor was apprehensive and uneasy; Capital was, as Kilshaw had said, alarmed; only Sir Robert Perry smiled, as he remarked to the Chief Justice at the Club,

"It can't last. His own men won't swallow all this. Medland must be mad to try it."

"Perhaps," suggested Sir John, "he doesn't

mean business. He may only want a strong platform to dissolve on."

"Riding for a fall, eh?"

"I shouldn't wonder."

"My experience is," observed Captain Heseltine, looking up from the *Stud Book*, "that chaps who ride for a fall come more unholy crumplers than anybody else."

"I hope you're right," said Sir Robert, with a smile.

And they discussed the matter with much acumen, and would doubtless have arrived at a true conclusion, had they known anything about the matter. But, as it happened, they were all ignorant of the real reason which dictated Medland's conduct. He had gauged the character of his most uncompromising and powerful enemy to a nicety. He knew that Kilshaw would be loth to make use of Benham, and yet that he would

make use of him. He saw that the danger which threatened him had become great and immediate. A stronger hand and a longer purse than Benham's were now against him. The chase had begun. He could not expect much law, and he was riding, not for a fall, but against time. He did not despair of escape, but the chances were against him. He must cover as much ground as he could before the pack was on his heels. So he brought in his bills, made his speeches, fluttered the dovecote of many a prejudice and many an interest, was the idol of the people, and never had a quiet hour.

Besides its more serious effects, the Premier's absorption in public affairs had the result of blinding him to the change that had gradually been coming over his own house. Norburn had always been in and out every hour; he was in and out still, but now he came straight from the street

door to the Premier's room, and went straight back thence to the street door again. The visits to Daisy, which had been wont to precede and follow, perhaps even sometimes to occasion, business conferences, ceased almost entirely; and the young Minister's brow bore a weight of care that the precarious position of the Cabinet was not alone enough to account for. It would seem as if Daisy must have noticed Norburn's altered ways, although her father did not; but she made no reference to them, and appeared to be aware of nothing which called for explanation or remark. Perhaps she missed Norburn's visits less because his place was so often filled by Dick Derosne, who, unable to find, or perhaps scorning, any pretext of business, came with the undisguised object of seeing the Premier's daughter, and not the Premier.

Whatever differences Eleanor Scaife and other

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studious inquirers may discover between young communities and old, it is safe to say that there are many points of resemblance: one of them is that, in both, folk talk a good deal about their neighbours' affairs. The stream of gossip, which Dick's indiscreet behaviour at Sir John Oakapple's dance had set a-flowing, was not diminished in current by his subsequent conduct. Some people believed that he was merely amusing himself, and were very much or very little shocked according to their temperaments and their views on such matters; others, with great surprise and regret, were forced to believe him serious, and wondered what he could be thinking of; a third class took the line sanctioned by the eminent authority of Mr. Tomes, and hailed the possibility of a union of more than private importance. Such a diversity of opinion powerfully promoted the interchange of views, and very soon there were but few people in



Kirton society, outside the two households most concerned, who were not watching the progress of the affair.

The circulating eddies of report at last reached Mr. Kilshaw, soon after he had, by his bargain with Benham, been put in possession of the facts that gentleman had to dispose of. Kilshaw knew Dick Derosne very well, and for a time he remained quiet, expecting to see Dick's zeal slacken and his infatuation cease of their own accord. When the opposite happened, Kilshaw's anger was stirred within him; he was ready to find, and in consequence at once found, a new sin and a fresh cause of offence in the Premier. Without considering that Medland had many things to do besides watching the course of flirtations or the development of passions, he hastily concluded that he had come upon another scheme and detected another manœuvre intended to strengthen the

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Premier's exposed position. He appreciated the advantage that such an alliance would be to a man threatened with the kind of revelation which menaced Medland; it was clear to his mind that Medland had appreciated it too, and had laid a cunning trap for Dick's innocent feet. It did not suit him to produce yet the public explosion which he destined for his enemy; but he lost no time in determining to checkmate this last ingenious move by some private communication which would put Dick—or perhaps better still, Dick's friends—on guard.

Mr. Dick Derosne perhaps was not unaware that many people in Kirton frowned on him as an unprincipled deceiver, or, at best, a fickle light-o'-love; he would have been much more surprised, and also more displeased, to know that there was even one who thought of him as a deluded innocent, and had determined to rescue him from the

snares which were set for his destruction. He did not feel like a deluded innocent. He was not sure how he did feel. Perhaps he also, as well as the man who was preparing to rescue him, had a subject which did not bear too much or too candid inward discussion; and he found it easier to stifle any attempt at importunity on the part of his conscience than Kilshaw did. Kilshaw could only appeal to the paramount interests of the public welfare as an excuse for his own doubtful dealing: Dick could and did look into Daisy Medland's eyes and forget that there was any need or occasion for excuse at all. Supposing she were fond of him—and he could not suppose anything else—what did he mean to do? Many people asked that question, but Dick Derosne himself was not among them. He knew that he would be very sorry to lose her, that she was the chief reason now why he found Kirton a pleasant place of

residence, and that he resented very highly any other man venturing to engross her conversation. Beyond that he did not go ; but the state of mind which these feelings indicated was no doubt quite enough to justify Kilshaw in deciding to have recourse to the Governor, and allow his message to Dick to filter through one who had more right than he had to offer counsel.

In a matter like this, to determine was to do. He got on his horse and rode through the Park towards Government House. In the Park he met Captain Heseltine, also mounted and looking very hot. The Captain mopped his face, and waved an accusing arm towards an inhospitable eucalyptus.

"Call that a tree!" he said. "The beastly thing doesn't give a ha'porth of shade."

"It's the best we've got," replied Kilshaw, in ironical apology for his country.

"As a rule, you know," the Captain continued, "coming out for a ride here, except at midnight, means standing up under a willow and wondering how the deuce you'll get home."

"Well, you're not under a willow now."

"No ; I was, but I had to quit. Derosne and Miss Medland turned me out."

"Ah !"

"Yes."

"You felt you ought to go ?"

"My tact told me so. I say, Kilshaw, what do you make of that ?"

"Nothing in it," answered Kilshaw confidently.

Captain Heseltine had but one test of sincerity, and it was a test to which he knew Kilshaw was, as a rule, quite ready to submit. He took out a small note-book from one pocket and a pencil from the other.

"What'll you lay that it doesn't come off?" he asked.

"I won't bet."

"Oh," said the Captain, scornfully implying that he ceased to attach value to Mr. Kilshaw's judgment.

"I won't bet, because I know."

"The deuce you do!" exclaimed Heseltine, promptly re-pocketing his apparatus.

"And, if you want another reason why I won't bet," continued Kilshaw, who did not like the Captain's air of incredulity, "I'll tell you. I'm going to stop it myself."

"Oh, of course, if *you* object!" said the Captain, with undisguised irony. "I hope, though, that you'll let me have a shot, after Dick."

"You won't want it, if you're a wise man. You wait a bit, my friend," and with a grim nod of his head, Kilshaw rode on.

The Captain looked after him with a meditative stare. Then he glanced at his watch.

"That beggar knows something," said he. "I think I'll go and interrupt friend Richard." And he continued, apostrophising the absent Dick—"To stay out, my boy, may not be easy; but to get out when you're once in, is the deuce!"

## CHAPTER XII.

### AN ABSURD AMBITION.

*Suave mari magno*—Like so many of us who quote these words, Mr. Coxon could not finish the line, but the tag as it stood was enough to express his feelings. If the Cabinet were going to the bottom, he was not to sink with it. If he had one foot in that leaky boat, the other was on firm ground. He had received unmistakable intimations that, if he would tread the path of penitence as Puttock had, the way should be strewn with roses, and the fatted calf duly forthcoming at the end of the journey. He had a right to plume



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himself on the dexterity which had landed him in such a desirable position, and he was fully awake to the price which that position made him worth. Now a man who commands a great price, thought Mr. Coxon, is a great man. So his meditations—which, in this commercial age, seem hardly open to adverse criticism—ran, as he walked towards Government House, just about the same time as Mr. Kilshaw was also thinking of betaking himself thither. A great man (Mr. Coxon's reflections continued) can aspire to the hand of any lady—more especially when he depends not merely on intellectual ability (which is by no means everything), but is also a man of culture, of breeding, of a University education, and of a very decent income. He forbore to throw his personal attractions into the scale, but he felt that if he were in other respects a suitable aspirant, no failure could await him on that score. Vanity apart, he

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could not be blind to the fact that he was in many ways different from most of his compatriots, still more from most of his colleagues.

"In all essentials I am an Englishman, pure and simple," thought he, as he entered the gates of Government House; but, the phrase failing quite to satisfy him, he substituted, as he rang the bell, "An English gentleman."

"Shall we go into the garden?" said Lady Eynesford, after she had bidden him welcome. "I dare say we shall find Miss Scaife there," and, as she spoke, she smiled most graciously.

Coxon followed her, his brow clouded for the first time that day. He was not anxious to find Miss Scaife, and he had begun to notice that Lady Eynesford always suggested Miss Scaife as a resource; her manner almost implied that he must come to see Miss Scaife.

"I can't think where she has got to," exclaimed

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Lady Eynesford, after a perfunctory search ; "but it's too hot to hunt. Sit down here in the verandah. Eleanor has probably concealed herself somewhere to read the last debate. She takes such an interest in all your affairs—the Ministry's, I mean."

"I noticed she was very attentive the other day."

"Oh, at that wretched House! Why don't you ventilate it? It gave poor Alicia quite a headache."

"I hope Miss Derosne is not still suffering?"

"Oh, it's nothing much. I suppose she feels this close weather. It's frightful, isn't it? I wonder you had the courage to walk up. It's very friendly of you, Mr. Coxon."

"With such an inducement, Lady Eynesford—" Coxon began, in his laboriously polite style.

"I know," laughed his hostess, and her air was so kind and confidential that Coxon was emboldened. He did not understand why people

called the Governor's wife cold and "stand-offish"; he always insisted that no one could be more cordial than she had shown herself towards him.

"What do you know?" he asked, with a smile, and an obviously assumed look of surprise.

"You don't suppose I think I'm the inducement—or even the Governor? And we can't find her! Too bad!" and Lady Eynesford shook her head in playful despair.

"But," said Coxon, feeling now quite happy, "isn't the—the inducement—at home?"

"Oh yes, she's somewhere," replied Lady Eynesford, good-naturedly ignoring her visitor's too ready acquiescence in her modest disclaimer.

"I'm afraid I'm a poor politician. I can conceal nothing."

"Your secret is quite safe with me, and no one else has guessed it."

"Not even Miss Scaife?" asked Coxon, with a

smile. Eleanor had so often managed a *tête-à-tête* for him, he remembered.

"Oh, I can't tell that—but, you know, we women never guess these things till we're told. It's not correct, Mr. Coxon."

"But you say you guessed it."

"That's quite different. I might guess it—or—or anybody else (though nobody has)—but not Eleanor."

A slight shade of perplexity crossed Coxon's brow. The lady, if kind and reassuring, was also somewhat enigmatical.

"I believe," he said, "Miss Scaife has guessed it."

"Indeed! And is she—pleased?"

"I hope so."

"So do I—for your sake."

"Her approbation would be a factor, would it?"

"Really, Mr. Coxon, I suppose it would!" exclaimed Lady Eynesford in surprise.

"I mean it would be likely to weigh with—with your sister-in-law?"

"With Alicia? Why, what has Alicia got to do with it?"

"You mustn't chaff me, Lady Eynesford. It's too serious," pleaded Coxon, in self-complacent tones.

"What does the man mean?" thought Lady Eynesford. Then a glance at his face somehow brought sudden illumination, and the illumination brought such a shock that Lady Eynesford was startled into vulgar directness of speech.

"Good gracious! Surely it *is* Eleanor you come after?" she exclaimed.

"Miss Scaife! What made you think that? Surely you've seen that it's Miss Derosne who——"

"Mr. Coxon!"

At the tone in which Lady Eynesford seemed to hurl his own name in his teeth, Coxon's rosy illusion vanished. He sat in gloomy silence

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twisting his hat in his hand and waiting for Lady Eynesford to speak again.

“You astonish me!” she said at last. “I made sure it was Eleanor.”

“Why is it astonishing?” he asked. “Surely Miss Derosne’s attractions are sufficient to——?”

“Oh, I’m so sorry, I am indeed. You must believe me, Mr. Coxon. If I had foreseen this I—I would have guarded against it. But now—indeed, I’m so sorry.”

Lady Eynesford’s sorrowful sympathy failed to touch Coxon’s softer feelings.

“What is there to be sorry about?” he demanded, almost roughly.

“Why this—this unfortunate misunderstanding. Of course I thought it was Eleanor; you seemed so suited to one another.”

Coxon, ignoring the natural affinity suggested, remarked,

"There's no harm done that I can see, except that I hoped I had you on my side. Perhaps I shall have still."

Sympathy had failed. Lady Eynesford, recognising that, felt she had a duty to perform.

"I dare say I am to blame," she said, "but I never thought of such a thing. Really, Mr. Coxon, you must see that I wasn't likely to think of it," and her tone conveyed an appeal to his calmer reason. She was quite unconscious of giving any reasonable cause of offence.

"Why not?" he asked, the silky smoothness of his manner disappearing in his surprise and wounded dignity.

"The—the—oh, if you don't see, I can't tell you."

"You appear to assume that attentions from me to your sister-in-law were not to be expected."

"You do see that, don't you?"



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“While attentions to your governess——”

“Miss Scaife is my friend and worthy of anybody’s attentions,” interposed Lady Eynesford quickly.

“But all the same, very different from Miss Derosne,” sneered Coxon sullenly, putting her thoughts into her mouth with a discrimination that completed her discomfiture.

“I don’t think there is any advantage in discussing it further,” remarked Lady Eynesford, rising.

“I claim to see Miss Derosne herself. I am not to be put off.”

“I will acquaint the Governor and my sister-in-law with your wishes. No doubt my husband will communicate with you. Good-morning, Mr. Coxon,” and Lady Eynesford performed her stiffest bow.

“Good-morning, Lady Eynesford,” he answered,

in no less hostile tones, and very different was the man who slammed the gate of Government House behind him from the bland and confident suitor who had entered it half-an-hour before.

The moment he was gone, Lady Eynesford ran to her husband.

"The next time you take a Governorship," she exclaimed, as she sank into a chair, "you must leave me at home."

"What's the matter now?"

Lady Eynesford, with much indignant comment, related the tale of Coxon's audacity.

"Of course I meant him for Eleanor," she concluded. "Did you ever hear of such a thing?"

"But, my dear, he must see Alicia if he wants to. We can't turn him out as if he was a foot-man! After all, he's got a considerable position here."

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"Here!" And the word expressed an opinion as comprehensive as, though far more condensed than, any to be found in Tomes.

"I suppose, Mary, there's no danger of—of Alicia being——?"

"Willie! I couldn't imagine it."

"Well, I'll just tell her, and then I'll write to Coxon and see what to do."

"Do make her understand it's impossible," urged Lady Eynesford.

"We've no reason to suppose she's ever thought of it," the Governor reminded his wife.

"No, of course not," she said. "I shall leave you alone with her, Willie."

Alicia came down at the Governor's summons.

"Well, here's another," said the Governor playfully.

Alicia's conquests had been somewhat numerous—such things were so hard to avoid, she pleaded

—and it was not the first time her brother had had to confront her with the slain.

“Another what?”

“Another victim. Mary has been here in a rage because a gentleman is ready to be at your feet. Now who do you think it is?”

“I shan’t guess. When I guess, I always guess wrong,” said Alicia, “and that——”

“Tells tales, doesn’t it? Well! it’s a great man this time.”

A sudden impossible idea ran through her head. Surely it couldn’t be——? But nothing we think of very much seems always impossible. It might be! Her air of raillery dropped from her. She sat down, blushing and breathing quickly.

“Who is it, Willie?” she gasped.

“No, you must guess,” said the Governor, over his shoulder; he was engaged in lighting a cigar.

"No, no ; tell me, tell me," she could not help crying.

At the sound of her voice, he turned quickly and looked curiously at her.

"Why, Al, what's the matter?" he asked uneasily.

Surely she could not care for that fellow? But girls were queer creatures. Lord Eynesford always doubted if they really knew a gentleman from one who was—well, very nearly a gentleman.

Alicia saw his puzzled look and forced a smile.

"Don't tease me. Who is it?"

"No less a man than a Minister."

"A—Willie, who is it?" she asked, and she stretched out a hand in entreaty.

"My dear girl, whatever——? Well, then, it's Coxon."

"Mr. Coxon! Oh!" and a sigh followed, the hand fell to her side, the flush vanished.

She felt a great relief ; the strain was over ; there was nothing to be faced now, and, as happens at first, peace seemed almost so sweet as to drown the taste of disappointment. Yet she could not have denied that the taste of disappointment was there.

“Oh ! how absurd !”

“It’s rather amusing,” said his Excellency, much relieved in his turn. “You won’t chaff Mary—promise.”

“What about ? No, I promise.”

“She thought he was sweet on Eleanor, and rather backed him up—asked him here and all that, you know—and it was you all the time.”

Alicia laughed.

“I thought Mary used to leave him a lot to Eleanor.”

“That’s it.”

“But Eleanor always passed him on to me.”

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"The deuce she did!" laughed Lord Eynesford.

"Don't tell Mary that!"

"Not I! Well, what shall I say? He wants to see you."

"How tiresome!"

"Look here, Al, Mary seems to have given him a bit of her mind; but I must be civil. We can't tell the chap that he's—well, you know. It wouldn't do out here. You don't mind seeing him, do you?"

Alicia said that she would do her duty.

"And shall I be safe in writing and telling him I can say nothing till he has discovered your inclinations?"

"You'll be perfectly safe," said Alicia with decision.

The Governor wrote his letter; it was a very civil letter indeed, and Lord Eynesford felt that it ought in some degree to assuage the wrath which

his wife's unseemly surprise had probably raised in Coxon's breast.

"It's all very well," he pondered, "for a man to be civil all round as I am; but his womankind can always give him away."

He closed his note, pushed the writing-pad from him, and, leaning back in his chair, puffed at his cigar. In the moment of reflection, the impression of Alicia's unexplained agitation revived in his memory.

"I don't believe," he mused, "that she expected me to say Coxon. I wonder if there's some one else; it looked like it. But who the deuce could it be here? It can't be Heseltine or Flemyng—they're not her sort—and there's no one else. Ah! the mail came in this morning, perhaps it's some one at home. That must be it. I like that fellow's impudence. Wonder who the other chap is. Perhaps I was wrong—you can't tell with women,



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they always manage to get excited about something. I swear there was nothing before I came out, and there's no one here, and——”

“Mr. Kilshaw,” announced Jackson.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### OUT OF HARM'S WAY.

"I DON'T see what business it is of his," said Dick to his brother the next afternoon. "I call it infernal impertinence."

Lord Eynesford differed.

"Well, I don't," he said. "He did it with great tact, and I'm very much obliged to him."

"I wish people would leave my affairs alone," Dick grumbled.

"Has it gone very far?" asked his brother, ignoring the grumble.

"Depends upon what you call far. There's nothing settled, if that's what you mean."

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"I don't know that I've any exact right to interfere, but isn't it about time you made up your mind whether you want it to go any farther?"

"What's the hurry?"

"Because," pursued the Governor, "it seems to me that going on as you're doing means either that you want to marry her, or that you're making a fool of her."

This pointed statement of the case awoke Dick's dormant conscience.

"And a cad of myself, you mean?" he asked.

"Same thing, isn't it?" replied his brother curtly.

"I suppose so," Dick admitted ruefully. "Hang it, I am a fool!"

"I don't imagine you want to do anything a gentleman wouldn't do. Only, if you do, you won't do it from my house—that's all."

"All right, old chap. Don't be so precious down on me. I didn't mean any harm. A fellow gets led on, you know—no, I don't mean by her—by circumstances, you know."

"I grant you she's pretty and pleasant, but she won't have a *son*, and—well, Medland's a very clever fellow and very distinguished. But——"

"No, I know. They're not our sort."

"Then of course it's no use blinking the fact that there's something wrong. I don't know what, but something."

"Did Kilshaw tell you that?"

"Yes, between ourselves, he did. He wouldn't tell me what, but said he knew what he was talking about, and that I'd better tell you that you and all of us would be very sorry before long if we had anything to do with the Medlands."

"What the deuce does he mean?" asked Dick fretfully.

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"Well, you know the sort of gossip that's about. Compare that with what Kilshaw said."

"What gossip?"

"Nonsense! You know well enough. It's impossible to live here without noticing that everybody thinks there's something wrong. I believe Kilshaw knows what it is, and, what's more, that he means to have it out some day. However that may be, rumours of the sort there are about are by themselves enough to stop any wise man."

"Old wives' scandal, I expect."

"Perhaps: perhaps not. Anyhow, I'd rather have no scandal, old wives' or any other, about my wife's family."

"I'm awfully fond of her," said Dick.

"Well, as I said, it's your look-out. I don't know what Mary 'll say, and—you've only got six hundred a year of your own, Dick."

"It seems to me we're in the deuce of a hurry—"

began Dick feebly, but his brother interrupted him.

"Come, Dick, do you suppose Kilshaw would have come to me, if he hadn't thought the matter serious? It wasn't a very pleasant interview for him. I expect you've been making the pace pretty warm."

Dick did not venture on a denial. He shifted about uneasily in his seat, and lit a cigarette with elaborate care.

"I don't want to be disagreeable," pursued the Governor, "but both for your sake and mine—not to speak of the girl's—I won't have anything that looks like trifling with her. You must make up your mind; you must go on, or you must drop it."

"How the devil can I drop it? I'm bound to meet her two or three times a week, and I can't cut her."

"You needn't flirt with her."

"Oh, needn't I? That's all you know about it."

The Governor was not offended by this rudeness.

"Then," he said, "if you don't mean to go on——"

"Who said I didn't?"

"Do you?"

Dick was driven into a corner. He asked why life was so ill-arranged, why he was poor, why a man might not look at a girl without proposing to her, why everybody was always so down on him, why people chattered so maliciously, why he was such a miserable devil, and many other questions. His brother relentlessly repeated his "Do you?" and at last Dick, red in the face, and with every sign of wholesome shame, blurted out,

"How can I marry her? You know I can't—especially after this story of Kilshaw's."

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"Very well. Then if you can't marry her, and yet can't help making love to her——"

"I didn't say I made love to her."

"But you do—making love to her, I say, as often as you see her, why, you mustn't see her."

"I'm bound to see her."

"As long as you stay here, yes. But you needn't stay here. We can govern New Lindsey without you, Dick, for a time, anyhow."

This suggestion fell as a new light on Dick Derosne. He waited a moment before answering it with a long-drawn "O-oh!"

"Yes," said the Governor, nodding emphatically. "You might just as well run home and give a look to things: most likely they're going to the deuce."

"But what am I to say to people?"

"Why, that you're going to look after some affairs of mine."



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"Will she believe that?"

"She? You said 'people!'"

"Hang it, Willie! I don't like bolting. Besides, it's not half bad out here. Do you think I've—I've behaved like a beast, Willie?"

"It looks like it."

"It's no more than what lots of fellows do."

"Not a bit: less than a great many, thank God, Dick. Come, old chap, do the square thing—the squarest thing you can do now."

"Give me till to-morrow," said Dick, and escaped in a jumble of conflicting feelings—smothered pride in his fascinations, honest reprobation of his recklessness, momentary romantic impulses, recurrent prudential recollections, longings to stay, impatience to get rid of the affair, regrets that he had ever met Daisy Medland, pangs at the notion of not meeting her in the future—a very hotch-pot of crossed and jarring inclinations.

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So the Governor did the right, the prudent thing, the only thing, the thing which he could not doubt was wise, and which all reasonable men must have seen to be inevitable. Nevertheless when he met Daisy Medland that afternoon in the Park, he felt much more like a pick-pocket than it is comfortable to feel when one is her Majesty's representative: for Dick was with him, and Daisy's eyes, which had lightened in joy at seeing them, clouded with disappointment as they rode past without stopping. Thus, when Dick turned very red and muttered, "*I am* a beast," the Governor moaned inwardly, "So am I."

It is perhaps creditable to Man—and Man, as opposed to Woman, in these days needs a word slipped in for him when it is reasonably possible—that these touches of tenderness fought against the stern resolve that had been taken. But of course they were only proper fruits of penitence, in Dick

for himself, in Lord Eynesford for his kind, and it could not be expected that they would reproduce themselves in persons so entirely innocent of actual or vicarious offence as Lady Eynesford and Eleanor Scaife.

"I think," said Lady Eynesford, "that we may congratulate ourselves on a very happy way of getting out of the results of Dick's folly."

"I can't think that Dick said anything really serious," remarked Eleanor.

"So much depends on how people understand things," observed Lady Eynesford.

It was on the tip of Eleanor's tongue to add, "Or wish to understand them," but she recollected that she had really no basis for this malicious insinuation, and made expiation for entertaining it by saying to Alicia,

"You think she's a nice girl, don't you?"

"Very," said Alicia briefly.

"The question is not what she is, so much as who she is," said Lady Eynesford.

"I expect it was all Dick's fault," said Alicia hastily.

"Or that man's," suggested the Governor's wife.

A month ago Alicia would have protested strongly. Now she held her peace: she could not trust herself to defend the Premier. Yet she was full of sympathy for his daughter, and of indignation at the tone in which her sister-in-law referred to him. Also she was indignant with Dick: this conduct of Dick's struck her as an impertinence, and, on behalf of the Medlands, she resented it. They talked, too, as if it were a flirtation with a milliner—dangerous enough to be troublesome, yet too absurd to be really dangerous—discreditable no doubt to Dick, but—she detected the underlying thought—still more discreditable to Daisy Medland. The injustice angered her: it would have angered

her at any time ; but her anger was forced to lie deeply hidden and secret, and the suppression made it more intense. Dick's flighty fancy caricatured the feeling with which she was struggling : the family attitude towards it faintly foreshadowed the consternation that the lightest hint of her unbanishable dream would raise. And, worst of all—so it seemed to her—what must Medland think ? He must surely scorn them all—this petty pride, their microscopic distinctions of rank, their little devices—all so small, yet all enough to justify the wounding of his daughter's heart. It gave her a sharp, almost unendurable pang to think that he might confound her in his sweeping judgment. Could he after—after what he had seen ? He might think she also trifled—that it was in the family—that they all thought it good fun to lead people on and then—draw back in scorn lest the suppliant should so much as touch them.

In the haste of an unreasoning impulse, she went to Medland's house, full of the idea of dissociating herself from what had been done, only dimly conscious of difficulties which, if they existed, she was yet resolute to sweep away. Convention should not stand between, nor cost her a single unkind thought from him.

She asked for Daisy Medland, and was shown into Daisy's little room. She had not long to wait before Daisy came in. Alicia ran to meet her, but dared not open the subject near her heart, for the young girl's bearing was calm and distant. Yet her eyes were red, for it was but two hours since Dick Derosne had flung himself out of that room, and she had been left alone, able at last to cast off the armour of wounded pride and girlish reticence. She had assumed it again to meet her new visitor, and Alicia's impetuous sympathy was frozen by the fear of seeming impertinence.

At last, in despair of finding words, yet set not to go with her errand undone, she stretched out her arms, crying—

“Daisy! Not with me, dear!”

Daisy was not proof against an assault like that. Her wounded pride—for Dick had not been enough of a diplomatist to hide the meaning of his sudden flight—had borne her through her interview with him, and he had gone away doubting if she had really cared for him; it broke down now. She sprang to Alicia's arms, and her comforter seemed to hear her own confession in the young girl's broken and half-stifled words.

“Do come again,” said Daisy, and Alicia, who after a long talk had risen to go, promised with a kiss.

The door opened and Medland came in. Alicia started, almost in fright.

“I came—I came—” she began in her agitation,

for she assumed that his daughter had told him her story.

"It's very kind of you," he answered, and she, still misunderstanding, went on eagerly—

"It's such a shame! Oh, you don't think I had anything to do with it?"

He looked curiously from one to the other, but said nothing.

Alicia kissed Daisy again and passed by him towards the door: he followed her, and, closing the door, said abruptly,

"What's a shame, Miss Derosne? What's the matter with Daisy?"

"You don't know? Oh, I've no right——"

"No; but tell me, please. Come in here," and he beckoned her into his own study.

"Is she in any trouble?" he asked again. "She won't tell me, you know, for fear of worrying me, so you must."



Somehow Alicia, unable to resist his request, stammered out the gist of the story; she blamed Dick as severely as he deserved, and shielded Daisy from all suspicion of haste in giving her affection; but the story stood out plain.

"And—and I was so afraid," she ended as she had begun, "that you would think that I had anything to do with it."

"Poor little Daisy!" he said softly. "No; I'm sure you hadn't. Ah, well, I dare say they're right."

He was so calm that she was almost indignant with him.

"Can't you feel for her—you, her father?" she exclaimed.

But a moment later she added, "I didn't mean that. Forgive me! I can't bear to think of the way she has been treated!"

He looked up suddenly and asked,

"Was it only—general objections—or—or anything in particular?"

"What do you mean? I don't know of anything in particular."

"I'm glad. I shouldn't have liked—but you won't understand. Well, you've been very kind."

She would not leave her doubt unsettled. His manner puzzled her.

"Do you know of anything?" she found courage to add.

"'The fathers eat sour grapes,'" he answered, with a bitter smile. "Poor little Daisy!"

"I believe you're hinting at something against yourself."

"Perhaps."

He held out his hand to bid her good-bye, adding,

"You'd better let us alone, Miss Derosne."

"Why should I let you alone? Why mayn't I be her friend?"

He made no direct answer, but said,

"Your news of what has happened—I mean of your friends' attitude—hardly surprises me. You won't suppose I feel it less, because it's my fault—and my poor girl has to suffer for it."

"Your fault?"

"Yes."

"I don't understand," she murmured.

"I hope you never need," he answered earnestly, holding out his hand again.

This time she took it, but, as she did, she looked full in his face and said,

"I will believe nothing against you, not even your own words. Good-bye."

Her voice faltered in the last syllable, and she ran hastily down the stairs.

Medland stood still for some minutes. Then he went in to his daughter and kissed her.

But even that night, in spite of his remorse and sorrow for her grief, his daughter was not alone in his thoughts.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### A FATAL SECESSION.

THE sudden departure of Dick Derosne was, according to Kilshaw's view of it, a notable triumph for him over his adversary ; but he was not a man to rest content with one victory. He had hardly achieved this success when a chance word from Captain Heseltine started him in a new enterprise, and a hint from Sir John Oakapple confirmed him in his course. He made up his mind not to wait for the slow growth of disaffection in Coxon's mind, but to accelerate the separation of that gentleman from his colleagues. The Captain had been pleased

to be much amused at the cessation of Coxon's visits to Government House: Eleanor Scaife's contempt for her supposed admirer was so strong that, when playfully taxed with hardness of heart, she repelled the charge with a vigour that pointed the Captain straight to the real fact. Having apprehended it, he thought himself in no way bound to observe an over-strict reticence as to Coxon's "cheek" and his deserved rebuff.

"In fact," he concluded, "love's at a discount. With Coxon and Dick before one's eyes, it really isn't good enough. All a fellow gets is a dashed good snubbing or his marching orders." And he added, as if addressing an imaginary waiter, "Thank you, I'm not taking it to-day."

His words fell on attentive ears, and the next time Kilshaw had a chance of conversing with Coxon at the Club, he did not forget what he had learnt from Captain Heseltine.

"How d'you do, Coxon?" said he. "Haven't seen you for a long time. Come and sit here. You weren't at the Governor's party the other night?"

Coxon, gratified at this cordial greeting, joined Mr. Kilshaw. They were alone in the Club luncheon-room, and Coxon was always anxious to hear anything that Sir Robert or his friends had to say. There was always a possibility that it might be very well worth his while to listen.

"I wasn't there," he said. "I don't go when I can help it."

"You used to be so regular," remarked Kilshaw in surprise, or seeming surprise.

Coxon gave a laugh of embarrassed vexation.

"I think I go as often as I'm wanted," he said. "To tell you the truth, Kilshaw, I find my lady a little high and mighty."

"Women can never separate politics and persons," observed Kilshaw, with a tolerant smile.

"It's no secret, I suppose, that she's not devoted to your chief."

Coxon looked up quickly. His wounded vanity had long sought for an explanation of the cruel rebuff he had endured.

"Well, I never put it down to that," he said.

"It can't be anything in yourself, can it?" asked Kilshaw, in bland innocence. "No, no; Lady Eynesford's one of us, and there's an end of it—though of course I wouldn't say it openly. Look at the different way she treats the Puttocks since they left you!"

"It's highly improper," observed Coxon.

"I grant it; but she's fond of Perry, and sees through his glasses. And then you must allow for her natural prejudices. Is Medland the sort of man who would suit her? Candidly now?"

"She needn't identify us all with Medland?"

"Come and have a cigar. Ah, there's Sir John!



How are you, Chief Justice? Looks a bit shaky, doesn't he? Come along, Coxon."

So saying, Kilshaw led the way to the smoking-room, and, when the pair were comfortably settled, he recurred to his topic.

"I remember her asking me—in confidence of course, and, all the same, perhaps not very discreetly—what in the world made you go over, and what made you stay over."

"And you said——?"

"I didn't know what to say. I never did understand, and I understand less than ever now."

"Haven't I explained in the House?"

"Oh, in the House! I tell you what it is, Coxon,—and you must stop me if you don't like to hear it—I shall always consider Medland got your support on false pretences."

Coxon did not stop him. He sat and bit his finger-nail while Kilshaw pointed out the discrep-

ancies between what Medland had foreshadowed and what he was doing. He did not consciously exaggerate, but he made as good a case as he could ; and he talked to an ear inclined to listen.

"He caught you and Puttock on false pretences—utterly false pretences," Kilshaw ended. "Puttock saw it pretty soon."

"I was too stupid, I suppose?"

"Well, if you like," said Kilshaw, with a laugh. "I suppose when one doesn't appreciate a man's game, one calls him stupid."

"I have no game," said Coxon stiffly.

"My dear fellow, I didn't mean it offensively. I'm sure you haven't, for if ever a man was sacrificing his position and his future on the altar of his convictions, you are."

Mr. Coxon looked noble, and felt uncomfortable.

"In a month or two," continued Kilshaw, laying his hand on his neighbour's arm and speaking

impressively, "Medland will be not only out of office, but a discredited man."

"Why?" asked the other uneasily, for Kilshaw's words implied some hidden knowledge: without that he could not have ventured on such a prophecy to a colleague of the Premier's.

"Never mind why. You know you can't last, and time will show the rest. He'll go—and all who stick to him. Well, I've said too much. Have you heard the news? But of course you have, Ministers hear everything."

"What news?"

"The Chief Justice thinks of resigning: he told me himself that he had spoken to Medland about it, and Medland had asked him to wait a little."

"What for?"

"Oh, Medland wants to get hold of a good man from England, I understood. He thinks nobody here equal to it."

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“ Complimentary to my profession out here.”

“ I know. I wonder at Medland : he’s generally so strong on ‘ Lindsey for the Lindseians,’ as he once said. In this matter he and Perry seem to have changed places.”

“ Really ? Then Sir Robert—— ?”

“ Yes, he’s quite anxious to have one of ourselves. I must say I heartily agree, and of course it could easily be managed, if Medland liked. Perry would do it in a minute. I really don’t see why the best berth in the colony is to be handed over to some hungry failure from London. But no doubt you’ll agree with Medland.”

“ Oh, I don’t know,” said Coxon. “ It seems to me rather a point where the Bar here ought to assert itself.”

“ I know, if we were in and had a fit man, we should hear nothing more of an importation. The best man in the colony would be glad to have it :

of course there's not the power a Minister has, or the interest of active political life, but it's well paid, very dignified, and, above all, permanent."

Now neither Kilshaw nor Coxon were dull men, and by this time they very well understood one another. They knew what they meant just as well as though they had been indecent enough to say it. "Help us to turn out Medland, and you shall be Chief Justice," said Kilshaw, in the name of Sir Robert Perry,—“Chief Justice, and once more a *persona grata* at Government House.” Chief Justice! Soon, perhaps, Sir Alfred! Would not that soften the Eynesford heart? Mr. Coxon honestly thought it would. The subtleties of English rank are not to be apprehended by a mere four years' visit to our shores.

"We expect Sir John to go on for a couple of months or so," Kilshaw continued. "I don't think he'll stay longer."

“Perhaps we shall be out by then.”

“Not as things stand, I’m afraid,” and Kilshaw shook his head. “Now if we could get you, Medland would be out in three weeks.”

“I must do what I think right.”

“My dear Coxon ! Of course !”

Mr. Kilshaw returned to his office well pleased. A careful computation showed that Medland was supported now by a steady majority of not more than eight : Coxon’s defection could not fail to leave him in a minority ; for, although Coxon was a young man, and, as yet, of no great independent weight in politics, he had acquired a factitious importance, partly from the prestige of a successful University career in England, still more from the fact that he was the only remaining member of the Ministry to whom moderate men and vested interests could look with any confidence. Shorn of him, as it had been shorn of Puttock, the Government

would stand revealed as the organ and expression of the Labour Party and nothing else, and Perry and Kilshaw doubted not that six or eight members of the House would be found to enter the "cave," if Coxon showed them the way. Then,— "Why then," said Mr. Kilshaw to his conscience, "we need not use that brute Benham at all ! There's a nice sop ! Lie down like a good dog, and stop barking !"

Indeed, had it been quite certain that Benham's aid would not still prove needful, Kilshaw would have been very glad to be rid of him. Complete leisure and full pockets appeared not to be, in his case, a favourable soil for the growth of virtue. No doubt Mr. Benham's position was in some respects a hard one. All men who have money in plenty and nothing to do claim from the wise a lenient judgment, and, besides these disadvantages, Benham laboured under the possession of a secret

—a secret of mighty power. What wonder if he spent much of his day in eating-houses and drinking-houses, obscurely hinting to admiring boon companions of the thing he could do and he would? Then, having drunk his fill, he would swagger, sometimes not over-steadily, out to the Park, and amuse himself by scowling at the Premier, or smiling a smile of hidden meaning at Daisy Medland, as they drove by. Also, he occasionally got into trouble: one zealous partisan of the Premier's rewarded an insinuation with a black eye, and Mr. Kilshaw's own servant, finding his master's pensioner besieging the house in a state of drink-begotten noisiness, kicked him down the street—an excess of zeal that cost Mr. Kilshaw a cheque next day. The danger was, however, of a worse thing than these. Kilshaw, suffering only what he doubtless deserved to suffer, went on thorns of fear lest some day Benham should not only explode his



bomb prematurely, but publish to the world at whose charges and under whose auspices the engineer was carrying out his task. And when Mr. Kilshaw contemplated this possibility, he found it hopeless to deny that there was pitch on his fingers. Publicity makes such a difference in men's judgments of themselves.

In this way things hung on for a week or so, and then, one afternoon, the Chief Justice rushed into the Club in a state of some excitement. Spying Perry and Kilshaw, he hastened to them.

"You have heard?" he cried.

"What?" asked Sir Robert, wiping his glasses and smiling quietly.

"No? I believe I'm the first. Coxon told me himself: he came into my room when I rose to-day. He's asked Medland to accept his resignation."

Kilshaw sprang to his feet.

"What on?" asked Sir Robert.

"The Accident-Liability Clause in the Factory Act."

"A very good ground," commented the ex-Premier. "Very cleverly chosen."

"What does Medland say?" asked Kilshaw eagerly. "Will he give way, or will he let him go?"

"I think the man's mad," said the Chief Justice. "He won't budge an inch. So Coxon goes—and he says a dozen will go with him."

Then Mr. Kilshaw's feelings overcame him.

"Hurrah!" he cried. "By heaven, we've got him now! We shall beat him on the Clause! Perry, you'll be back in a week!"

"It looks like it," said Sir Robert, "but one never knows."

"Puttock's solid, and now Coxon! Perry, we

shall beat him by anything from six to ten! I shan't die a pauper yet!"

Sir John bustled on, anxious to anticipate in other quarters the coming newsvendor, and Sir Robert turned to his lieutenant.

"I suppose he must have his price," he remarked, with deep regret evident in his tone.

"I can't look him in the face if he doesn't," answered Kilshaw. "By Jove, Perry, he's earned it."

"Oh yes, so did Iscariot," said Sir Robert. "But it wasn't a Judgeship."

"You won't go back on it, Perry?"

Sir Robert spread out his thin white hands before him, and shook his head sorrowfully.

"A bargain's a bargain, I suppose," said he, "even if it happens to be rather an iniquitous one," and having enunciated this principle, on which he had often insisted in public, he took up a volume of poetry.

Not so Mr. Kilshaw. He flitted from friend to friend, telling the good news and exchanging congratulations. The evening papers announced the resignation and its impending acceptance, and further stated that the rumour was that the Premier had convened a meeting of his remaining followers to consider their position.

"They may consider all night," said Mr. Kilshaw, "but they can't change a minority into a majority," and he hailed a cab to take him home.

Suddenly he was touched on the shoulder. Turning, he found Benham beside him.

"Good news, eh?" said that worthy. "Shake hands on it, Mr. Kilshaw."

Kilshaw swallowed his first-formed words, and, after a moment's hesitation, put out his hand. Benham shook it warmly, saying,

"I guess we'll blow him up between us. There's my fist on it. See you soon," and, with a

lurching step and a leer over his shoulder, he walked on.

Kilshaw looked at his hand.

"Thank God I had my glove on," he said, and got into his cab.

Certainly there is no rose without a thorn.

When the Governor announced to his household that he had accepted Coxon's resignation, and that it was understood that the retiring Minister would henceforward act with Sir Robert Perry, the news was variously received. Captain Heseltine's observation was brief, but comprehensive.

"Rats!" said he.

Alicia nodded to him with a smile. Eleanor Scaife began to argue the pros and cons of the Accident-Liability Clause, as to which, she considered, there might fairly be a difference of opinion. Lady Eynesford cut across the inchoate disquisition by remarking,

"I have never disliked Mr. Coxon, but he doesn't quite know his place," and nothing that anybody could say made her see any absurdity in this remark.

## CHAPTER XV.

### AN ATTEMPT AT TERRORISM.

ALL the world was driving, riding, or walking in the great avenue of the Park. The Governor had just gone by on horseback, accompanied by his sister and his A.D.C.'s, and Lady Eynesford's carriage was drawn up by the pathway. The air was full of gossip and rumours, for although it was an "off-day" at the House, and nothing important was expected to happen there before the following Monday, there had been that morning a meeting of the Premier's principal adherents, and every one knew or professed to know the decision arrived at. One said resignation, another dissolution, a third

coalition, a fourth submission, and the variety of report only increased the confidence with which each man backed his opinion. Sir Robert Perry alone knew nothing, had heard nothing, and would guess nothing—by which adroit attitude he doubled his reputation for omniscience. And Mr. Kilshaw alone cared nothing : the Ministry was “cornered,” he said, and that was enough for him. Eleanor Scaife was insatiable for information, or, failing that, conjecture, and she eagerly questioned the throng of men who came and went, paying their respects to the Governor’s wife, and lingering to say a few words on the situation. Sir John Oakapple fixed himself permanently by the steps of the carriage, and played the part of a good-humoured though cynical chorus to the shifting drama.

Presently, a little way off, Mr. Coxon made his appearance, showing in his manner a pleased consciousness of his importance. They all wanted a



word with him, and laid traps to catch a hint of his future action ; he had explained his motives and refused to explain his intentions half-a-dozen times at least. If this flattering prominence could last, he must think twice before he accepted even the most dignified of shelves ; but his cool head told him it would not, and he was glad to remember the provision he had made for a rainy day. Meanwhile he basked in the sun of notoriety, and played his *rôle* of the man of principle.

“Ah,” exclaimed Eleanor, “here comes the hero of the hour, the maker and unmaker of Ministries.”

“As the weather-cock makes and unmakes the wind,” said Sir John, with a smile.

“What ? Mr. Coxon ?” said Lady Eynesford, and, pleased to have an opportunity of renewing her politeness without revoking her edict, she made the late Minister a very gracious bow.

Coxon's face lit up as he returned the salutation. Had his reward come already? He had been right then; it was not towards him as himself, but towards the Medlandite that Lady Eynesford had displayed her arrogance and scorn. Smothering his recurrent misgivings, and ignoring the weakness of his theory, he laid the balm to his sore and obliterated all traces of wounded dignity from his response to Lady Eynesford's advance.

"My husband tells me," she said, "that I must leave my opinion of your exploits unspoken, Mr. Coxon. Why do you laugh, Sir John?"

"At a wife's obedience, Lady Eynesford."

"Then," said Coxon, "I shall indulge myself by imagining that I have your approbation."

"And what is going to happen?" asked Eleanor for about the twentieth time that day.

Coxon smiled and shook his head.

"They all do that," observed Sir John. "Come, Coxon, admit you don't know."

"We'd better suppose that it's as the Chief Justice says," answered Coxon, whose smile still hinted wilful reticence.

"But think how uninteresting it makes you!" protested Eleanor.

"Oh, I don't agree," said Lady Eynesford. "I am studying every line of Mr. Coxon's face, and trying to find out for myself."

"I told you," he said in a lower voice, and under cover of a joke Sir John was retailing to Eleanor, "that I was a bad hand at concealment."

"I hope you have not remembered all I said then as well as all you said? I was so surprised and—and upset. Was I very rude?"

The implied apology disarmed Coxon of his last resentment.

"I was afraid," he said, "it meant an end to our acquaint——"

"Our friendship," interposed the lady with swift graciousness. "Oh, then, I was much more disagreeable than I meant to be."

"It didn't mean that?"

"You don't ask seriously? Now do tell me—what about the Ministry?"

He sank his voice as he answered,

"They can't possibly last a week."

"You are sure?"

"Certain, Lady Eynesford. They'll be beaten on Monday."

Lady Eynesford, with a significant smile, beat one gloved hand softly against the other.

"That can't be seen outside the carriage, can it? You mustn't tell of me! And we owe it all to you, Mr. Coxon!" And for the moment Lady Eynesford's heart really warmed to the man who

had relieved her of the Medlands. "When are you coming to see us?" she went on. "Or is it wrong for you to come now? Politically wrong, I mean."

"I was afraid it might be wrong otherwise," Coxon suggested.

"Not unless you feel it so, I'm sure."

"Perhaps Miss Derosne—" he began, but Lady Eynesford was on the alert.

"Her friendly feelings towards you have undergone no change, and if you can forget— Ah, here are Alicia and my husband!" and Lady Eynesford, feeling the arrival excellently well timed, broke off the *tête-à-tête* before the protests she feared could form themselves on Coxon's lips.

It might be that Alicia's feelings had undergone no change, but, if so, Coxon was forced to recognise that he could never have enjoyed a large share of her favour, for she acknowledged his presence with

the minimum of civility, and, when he addressed her directly, replied with the coldness of pronounced displeasure.

Lady Eynesford, perceiving that graciousness on her part was perfectly safe, redoubled her efforts to soothe the despised admirer. She had liked him well enough, he had served her against her enemies, and she was ready and eager to do all she could to soften the blow, provided always that she could rely on the blow being struck. Now, from Alicia's manner it was plain that the blow had fallen from an unfaltering hand.

Suddenly the Chief Justice said,

"Ah, it's settled one way or the other. Here come Medland and Miss Daisy."

In the distance the Premier appeared, walking by the pony his daughter rode. Lady Eynesford turned to her husband and whispered appealingly,

"Need they come here, Willie?"

He shook his head in indulgent disapproval, and said to Alicia,

"Come, Al, we'll go and speak to them," and before Lady Eynesford could declare Alicia's company unnecessary, the pair had turned their horses' heads and were on the way to join the Medlands.

Lady Eynesford's eyes followed them. She saw the meeting, and presently she noticed the Governor ride on with Daisy Medland, while Alicia walked her horse and kept pace with the Premier. They passed by her on the other side of the broad avenue, Medland acknowledging her salutation but not crossing to speak to her. She saw Alicia's heightened colour and the eager interest with which she bent down to catch Medland's words. Medland spoke quickly and earnestly. Once he laughed, and Alicia's gay peal struck on her sister-in-law's ear. Lady Eynesford, as

she looked after them, heard Sir John say to Eleanor,

“He’s a wonderful man, with a very extraordinary attraction about him. Everybody feels it who comes into personal relations with him. I know I do. And Perry has remarked the same thing to me. Lady Perry, you know, like all women, openly admires him. It’s very amusing to see Sir Robert’s face when she praises him.”

Lady Eynesford did not notice Eleanor’s reply. A frown gathered on her brow as she still gazed after the two figures. What did they mean by talking about the man’s attractiveness? He had never attracted her: and Alicia— It suddenly struck her that Alicia’s former championship of the Premier had changed to a complete silence, and she was vaguely disturbed by the idea of this unnatural reticence. Alicia, she knew, was friendly,



too friendly, with the girl; that did not so much matter now that Dick was safe on board ship. But if the friendship were not only for the daughter!

She roused herself from her reverie and turned again to Coxon. She found him looking at her closely, with a bitter smile on his lips. She had not noticed that Eleanor had got out and accepted Sir John's escort for a stroll. She and Coxon were alone.

"Miss Derosne's displeasure with me," he said, "is fully explained, isn't it?"

"What do you mean?" she asked sharply.

For reply he pointed with his cane.

"She favours the Ministry," he said. "Your views are not hers, Lady Eynesford."

"Oh, she knows nothing about politics."

"Perhaps it isn't all politics," he answered, with a boldly undisguised significance.

Lady Eynesford turned quickly on him, a haughty rebuke on her lips, but he did not quail. He smiled his bitter smile again, and she turned away with her words unspoken.

A silence followed. Coxon was wondering if his hint had gone too far. Lady Eynesford wondered how far he had meant it to carry. The idea of danger there was new and strange, and perhaps absurd, but infinitely disagreeable and disquieting.

"Well, good-bye, Lady Eynesford," he began.

"No, don't go," she answered. But before she could say more, there was a sudden stir in the footpath, voices broke out in eager talk, groups formed, and men ran from one to the other. Women's high voices asked for the news, and men's deep tones declared it in answer. Coxon turned eagerly to look, and as he did so, Kilshaw's carriage dashed up. Kilshaw sat inside, with the

evening paper in his hand. He hurriedly greeted Lady Eynesford, and went on—

“Pray excuse me, but have you seen Sir Robert Perry? I am most anxious to find him.”

“He’s there on the path,” answered Coxon, and Kilshaw leapt to the ground.

“Run and listen, and come and tell me,” cried Lady Eynesford, and Coxon, hastening off, overtook Kilshaw just as the latter came upon Sir Robert Perry.

The news soon spread. The Premier, conscious of his danger, had determined on a demonstration of his power. On the Sunday before that eventful, much-discussed Monday, when the critical clause was to come before the Legislative Assembly, he and his followers had decided to convene mass-meetings throughout the country, in every constituency whose member was a waverer, or suspected of being one of “Coxon’s rats,” as somebody

—possibly Captain Heseltine — had nicknamed them. This was bad, Kilshaw declared. But far worse remained: in the capital itself, in that very Park in which they were, there was to be an immense meeting: the Premier himself would speak, and the thousands who listened were to threaten the recreant Legislature with vengeance if it threw out the people's Minister.

“It's nothing more or less than an attempt to terrorise us,” declared Sir Robert, in calm and deliberate tones. “It's a most unconstitutional and dangerous thing.”

And Kilshaw endorsed his chief's views in less measured tones.

“If there's bloodshed, on his head be it! If he appeals to force, by Jove, he shall have it!”

Amid all this ferment the Premier walked by, half hidden by Alicia Derosne's horse.

“What is the excitement?” she exclaimed.

"My last shot," he answered, smiling. "Good-bye. Go and hear me abused."

Lady Eynesford would have been none the happier for knowing that Alicia thought, and Medland found, a smile answer enough.

END OF VOL. I.



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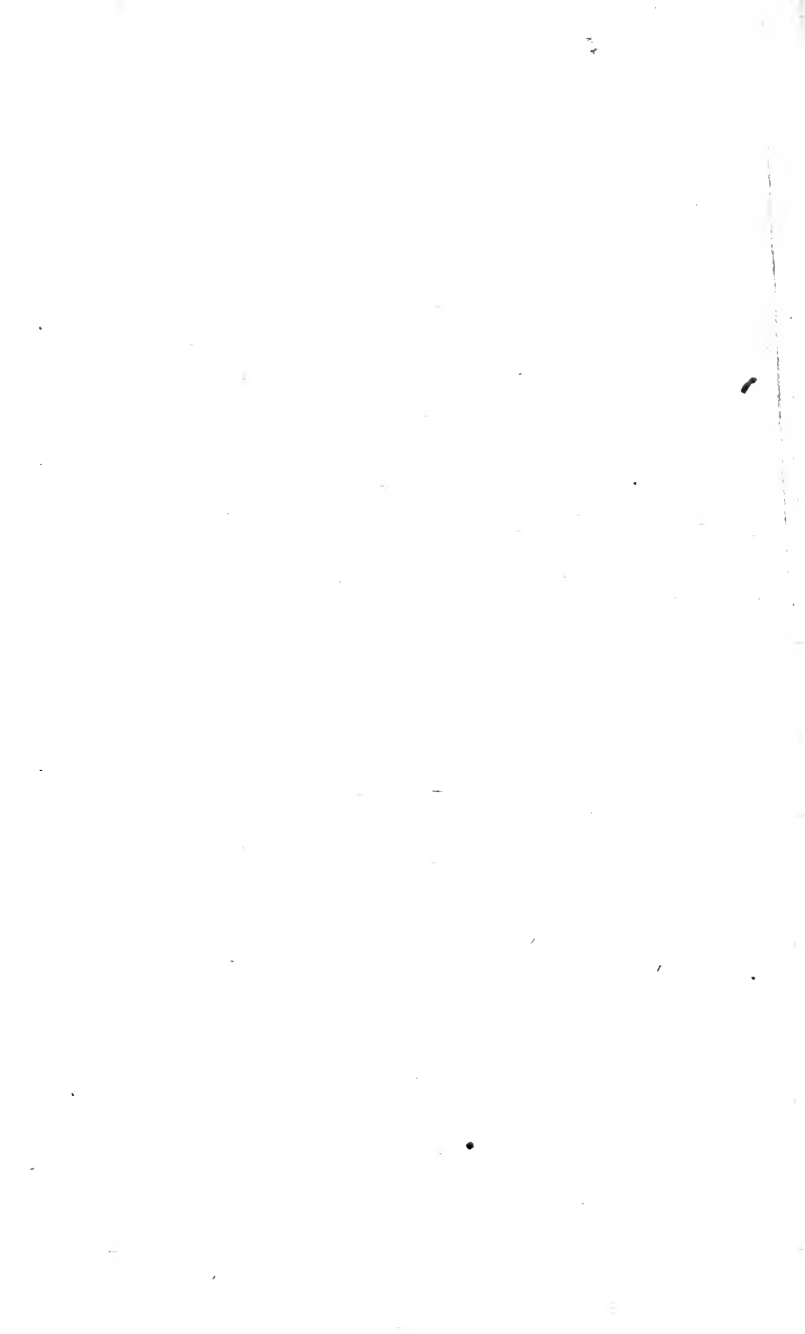
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